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The War Detective; or, Secret Service in the Rebellion

BY MAJOR A. F. GRANT.

A Story of Booth's Great Conspiracy.



Paul Phillips, the Union spy of Richmond, makes a desperate break for liberty

The War Detective;

—or—

SECRET SERVICE IN THE REBELLION.

Story of Booth's Great Conspiracy.

BY MAJOR A. F. GRANT.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN WILKES BOOTH

"Look at that, boy, and lend me your opinion,"

The speaker, a man apparently fifty years of age, threw into a youth's lap a piece of paper, folded like most business communications usually are.

"What! have you been getting letters?" smiled the young man, as he picked up the paper and began to unfold it.

"It looks that way, and from high authority, too.

"Not from—" Here the speaker opened the letter, and finished with an exclamation: "From President Davis!"

"Yes, from Jeff himself," was the reply. "Its contents will both surprise and puzzle you, but read and see whether I am correct or not."

The next moment the youth was reading the letter which was quite brief, and in the well known handwriting of the president of the Southern Confederacy.

This was what he read:

"EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT, C. S. A.,
RICHMOND, VA., Feb. 9, 1865.

"MR. CANTWELL: Dear Sir—It is my earnest desire that you discover something about the man Maxon as soon as possible. I am fearful that he is a Northern agent in Colonel Baker's pay. I place much reliance on you, and feel assured that you will devote your time and energies to the service of the Confederacy. Maxon, I feel, from what I have learned, is not a proper person to be in Richmond at this time. Very truly yours,

"JEFFERSON DAVIS."

"From the head of the Confederacy himself, and no mistake," said the younger of the twain, aloud, looking up into the almost expressionless face of his companion.

"You are right, Leon. This letter both surprises and puzzles me. Why should Davis address it to you, and who is this man Maxon suspected of being one of Baker's spies?"

A slight smile appeared at the corners of the listener's mouth.

"One question at a time, Paul," he said. "Mr. Davis addresses me because he thinks I am a proper person to attend to Maxon. When did I meet the rebel president? Oh, since you left Richmond I have had several interviews with his excellency."

"You have?" exclaimed the young man. "By heavens! you have more courage than Maxon!"

"One needs a little courage here to play the game I am playing, eh, Paul?" was the reply. "Yes, Jefferson Davis thinks me loyal to the cause, even now on its last legs in the trenches before Petersburg. Why should he suspect a man introduced and vouched for by his own secretary of war?"

Paul looked astonished.

"Who vouched for you to the secretary?" he asked.

"My letters."

"From whom?"

"From some of the secretary's Canadian friends, let us say, Paul. Why, sir, I've been a frequent visitor at the Confederate war office during the last fortnight. I could stuff you with information that would delight Grant, and take much of the sadness from Lincoln's face. I'm not a secret agent of this tottering government, although that letter would make me one. Now, to your next question: Who is the man Maxon? Ifancy you would start if you knew."

Paul did not reply, but kept looking into the speaker's face.

"We detectives always have secrets," he went on, "and the one I am about to impart would speedily put a hangman's noose over my head if it was known beyond these walls. I am Maxon."

The youth, not prepared for such a revelation, almost started from his chair.

"Do you mean to say that Davis wants you to hunt down and hang yourself?" he cried.

"He means that and nothing less," was the quiet answer. "I fear that, as Maxon, the Tennessean, I took one step too many, but it cannot be recalled at this stage of the game. At any rate, I am suspected, it seems—as Maxon, I mean—but as yet no one believes that Cantwell is a Northern detective in the Confederate capital."

"But how long will you be safe if Maxon is suspected?" asked Paul, quickly.

"Until I fulfill my mission here."

"When will that be?"

"Before morning, if my friend keeps her appointment.

"Then you have taken a woman into your confidence?"

"Why not? You forget, Paul, that you have been gone three weeks. In that period I have had time to play several games."

"I know that, Leon, but—"

"You don't like this woman business?"

"I confess frankly that I do not. You are an old detective and know what is best, I suppose, but were I in your shoes here in the heart of the Southern Confederacy, I would let women severely alone."

Cantwell smiled again.

"I admire your frankness, boy," he said. "Nevertheless I have intrusted my identity to a woman. She could go out on the streets of Richmond and by one word have me lanced into eternity before-to-morrow. This woman I never saw before I came here. I never met her until a few days ago. She is a mystery, for I never even saw her face."

Paul, the youth, could hardly repress an exclamation of astonishment.

"I speak the truth," the war detective went on. "I have heard her voice; she has talked with me for an hour, but I cannot say whether she is homely, or as beautiful as Psyche. She has never told me that she is loyal to the Union. For all I know, she may be a Confederate."

Paul did not speak, he sat at the table with a stare of wonderment, as if he doubted Cantwell's sanity.

"I have said that my mission to Richmond may end, if she keeps her appointment, before morning," continued the detective, taking out his watch. "She should be here now. If she does not come to-night—"

A low rapping like a signal broke Cantwell's sentences, and Paul threw a quick look toward the door.

"She is here, Paul. Quick! enter your room, but do not close the door tightly. I want you to see something of this woman, and I also want you to hear her report."

The young man left the room and entered an apartment a few steps away, closing the door after him in a manner that left a little space, to which he applied his eyes.

The graceful form and carriage noticed by Paul as the detective's visitor advanced to the chair he had just vacated, told him that the lady was young and accomplished.

His fingers itched to lift the dark brown veil, and expose the face which Cantwell even had not seen.

"I have not been waiting for you long," said the detective, as if in response to a remark by his visitor as she dropped into the chair. "I have been amused with a letter which I received a few minutes ago."

"A letter?" echoed the lady, in a voice whose rich tones fell melodiously on Paul's ears. "Was it delivered?"

"It was," and drawing from his pocket the letter he had received from Jefferson Davis, Cantwell placed it in her hands.

Paul saw a pair of gloved hands unfold the letter and hold it in a manner so as to place the lamp almost between her and it.

Then, for a while, she read through the veil.

"Well, will you find Mr. Maxon?" she asked, suddenly turning upon Cantwell. "Mr. Davis, I am sure, is quite anxious to fix his identity."

Paul was anxious to hear Cantwell's reply.

Did the strange woman know that he and Maxon were one?

Was it possible that Cantwell had surrendered to her all his secrets?

"I may hunt for Mr. Maxon," was the reply, in all seriousness; "but I am anxious to leave Richmond. I have been here six months, you know, and six months in the shadow of the halter is not a pleasant residence. I have tarried here for your report."

The last sentence seemed to shut off further questioning by the woman.

She laid the letter, folded carefully, within Cantwell's reach, and threw a rapid glance around the room.

"My report?" she said. "Yes, you have been waiting for that. I have not forgotten it. I have been playing a role from which I would have shrunk with loathing, a short time ago. I have turned spy, informer, traitress, and sleuth-hound. I almost wish to God that I had never seen the light of day. I have told you that there is on foot the blackest conspiracy ever born in the brain of man. The bare mention of it would chill your blood. It has chilled mine. I cannot think of it without a shudder. My God! why did I ever meet you, Silas Cantwell? Why did I ever intimate that I knew a traitor blacker than the road that leads to perdition?"

The veiled speaker left her chair and started toward the door.

Cantwell did not attempt to detain her, but fixed upon her his penetrating black eyes without a single glance toward Paul.

"I ought to fly, and yet I ought to tell you all I know," she went on, coming back from the door whose knob her fingers had actually touched. "Silas Cantwell, you know and I know that the cause of the South is lost. Grant cannot be kept from this city much longer, Four years of bloodshed will establish no rival

Union in this country. I thank God for that! Thousands of blue-coats and gray-jackets have fallen in battle; but the end is near at hand. It is to be an end that will shock the world. One man has sworn to make history that will never be forgotten; he has recorded in Heaven an oath before which you would stand aghast. You want me to tell you what that oath is, for unless you know, neither you nor any one else can frustrate him. But I cannot tell you what it is."

"Very well," said the war detective, calmly. "This is your final report, I suppose. For this I have overstayed my time in the rebel capital, and disobeyed my superior."

There was a tinge of bitterness in Cantwell's tones.

"Cantwell, Cantwell! I am oath-bound as to the awful scheme afoot," cried the mysterious woman. "Would to Heaven I had died before I took the vow. I followed him too closely. I ferreted him out wherever he went. I have been his shadow for days. He is in Richmond now; but he may not be here at daylight."

Paul laid his hand on the door-knob, for an almost uncontrollable impulse was forcing him into the room where Cantwell faced his excited visitor.

"Ha! he turned on you when you got too close, eh?" said Cantwell, in a voice that kept Paul back.

"Yes, yes."

"And he bound you to secrecy by an oath?"

"An oath that rings in my ears this moment."

"Go over it in your mind. He swore you not to reveal his plot; not to expose his scheme. Dare you reveal his name? If you dare, speak out, and leave the rest to me."

Paul could see that the detective's eyes seemed to burn their way through the veil that hid the woman's face.

She rose slowly from the chair and threw a right hand heavenward.

"Record it against me, Heaven, if in speaking his name I break my oath," she said, solemnly. "He swore me not to reveal what I had heard and seen. I will take upon myself the responsibility of speaking his name. If I violate the awful vow he forced from my lips, may the penalty he attached to it be visited upon my head."

Cantwell looked like a man who had triumphed.

The uplifted arm dropped at the woman's side again, and her hidden face was turned upon the detective.

"His name now?"

"John Wilkes Booth!"

The name seemed to find an echo in Paul's heart.

"Ho!" he ejaculated; "was all that theatrical display for the purpose of mentioning that name? I've seen the fellow on the boards."

As for Cantwell, he had made no reply to the revelation, and it was easy to see that the name of the young actor had strangely impressed him.

The time was near when it would startle a world.

CHAPTER II. THE BIT OF PAPER.

John Wilkes Booth!

What was there in the sound of that name at that time to startle any one?

He was an actor of some repute, who had starred with success through the principal cities of the North, drawing crowds as much by the fame of his father as by his own merits.

He was known everywhere as the son of Junius Brutus Booth, a tragedian of note, and one of the greatest Richards the stage has ever seen.

His friends knew that his heart was wrapped up in the cause of the Confederacy, but not one of them dreamed that he was about to establish his fame in a manner which would cover his name with curses for all time to come.

Paul, the youth who even laughed at the veiled woman's relation, knew Booth; he had seen him act, and had a passing acquaintance with him.

That he was maturing a plot, the consummation of which was to startle a world, was, in his estimation, preposterous.

In short, he did not believe it.

Suddenly Cantwell started toward the woman.

"I thank you," he said. "So it is J. Wilkes Booth, or Wilkes, as I used to call him who bound you with an oath?"

"Do you know him?"

"I used to. He was here before the war and played two seasons. We got pretty thick then. So he is here now? I wonder if he'd know me?"

Cantwell spoke the last sentence in a meditative strain, and but half audible.

"Are you going to see him?" asked the veiled woman, displaying some agitation despite the mask.

"Why not?"

"He might betray you. You forget that the South has no truer friend than Wilkes Booth."

"He, for the Confederacy? I might have known that. When we parted last the North was being aroused by the guns of Fort Sumter, and he said: 'Good-by, Silas. There'll be two governments on this continent when the battle smoke clears away.' I haven't seen him since. Yes, I will see him if I can, and I will know in what way he is going to shock the world."

"Fud out, for Heaven's sake, and do so quickly, cried the strange woman, laying her hand on the war detective's arm. "I dare not tell you what I have heard. Oh, I wish I had never been born! When the time comes—when the deed has been done, Cantwell, think of me and feel how I would like to have prevented it."

Her hand fell from Cantwell's arm, and she stepped back.

"We may leave Richmond again," said the detective, stepping toward her. "I may leave Richmond within the next three hours, but I cannot say. Recollect, that I have never even sought to know your name. You are at liberty to leave my room; but if you will show your face, I will look; if you wish to speak your oame, I will listen."

"Cantwell, I will satisfy your curiosity," was the answer. "You may call me Pauline; as for my face, behold it!"

With the last word one of the gloved hands raised the veil and showed the face of a young woman, who could not have passed her twentieth year.

It was fair and faultless in symmetry, with large, lustrous blue eyes, a bewitching mouth, and crowned with a look of intelligence.

Cantwell, at once struck with its beauty, leaned forward with an expression of admiration on his lips, but at that moment the veil dropped over the pleasing picture, and Pauline's voice said:

"Enough. I must go."

The war detective would have restrained the beauty of Richmond if the door behind him had not been thrown open at that instant, and Paul leaped into the room.

"Let me see that face again!" he cried, halting before the mysterious woman. "Can it be that I stand before—"

He was interrupted by a piercing cry from the unseen lips.

"No—no!" and the veiled woman moved toward the door. "In the name of Heaven what brought you to Richmond?" she cried, looking at Paul. "Which flag do you serve? Paul Phillips, you rise before me like a ghost. Are you a Northern spy, like that man there? Has Colonel Baker sent you to Richmond to die with a rope around your neck? Go back to the Yankee army! Cantwell, send him from Richmond this very night. He will obey you, or he would not be here now. There was a time when he refused to listen to me. He will refuse again. Paul, there is a man in Richmond who knows that you are here as a Union agent. I did not expect to meet you here; but I did not forget your papers. Here they are. The next time keep your discoveries from paper."

As she finished, the veiled woman threw a packet at Paul's feet.

He lost color as he pounced upon it, and clutched it with an ejaculation of joy.

"He had those papers stolen from him a few nights ago," said Pauline, turning to Cantwell. "They're enough to hang him. Do you always let your scholars—your spies—write their discoveries down in the enemies country? I got his papers for him. I have saved his life. No thanks, Paul Phillips. The next time exercise a little more discretion."

She pulled the door open and stepped across the threshold.

Paul leaped forward.

"Pauline, one word—one—"

"No; not another syllable!" and she was gone.

For a minute the young man stood in the doorway with the echo of her refusal in his ears, then he was recalled to the present by Cantwell's voice.

"Hang me, if I know who mystifies me the most—you or that strange woman," said the war detective. "You have met her before, it seems?"

"Yes; but stop where you are, Cantwell," said Paul, coming forward, with uplifted hand. "I did not think she was in Richmond. Heaven, I wish I could forget some things!"

"If you had had a little more patience I would have got his whereabouts from Pauline," he said. "Now I'll have to hunt him for myself."

"And you are still determined to find him?"

"I am."

"You think him capable of doing something against the North?"

"There," said the detective, gently, but with resolution. "I told you awhile ago, Paul, that we detectives have some sacred secrets. Let me say that I will see Wilkes Booth if I can before I leave Richmond. Do you know what brings him here at this time? Do you not know that the air in certain quarters is filled with threats of assassination?"

"I know that Grant's life is threatened. Men say openly here that he will never live to take Lee's sword."

"Tell me the man who said that. You have been in Richmond long enough to know the prominent Confederates. Can you name the man who threatened Grant?"

"I can do so. It was Colonel Opal—a man whom you must know."

"Colonel Opal!" echoed Cantwell. "Why, that man presented Wilkes Booth with a magnificent wardrobe for Richard III. when he last played in Richmond. What do you think now, Paul?"

"It proves nothing. I do not see how you can connect Colonel Opal's boast with the wild scheme Pauline ascribes to Booth's brain."

The detective was silent.

"This Colonel Opal is a fire-eater of the first class," he said, after awhile. "I have made a study of him during your absence from the city. He is capable of really doing something desperate. I have my doubts whether he is altogether in his right mind."

"Then his boasts and threats amount to nothing."

Cantwell slowly shook his head.

"There may be a method in his madness," he said. "Since you know him, let me ask if you have ever seen any of his handwriting?"

"I have seen a good deal of it."

"Enough to recognize a specimen of it if one were placed before him?"

"I think so."

Cantwell made no reply but drew from his pocket a slip of paper, which had been torn into three pieces, but was now a whole, having been pasted together.

He stepped to the table and laid the paper under the lamp, knowing that the young man had followed him and was then at his side.

"Is that in Colonel Opal's handwriting?" queried Cantwell, glancing from the paper to Paul. "Bend down and view it closely. It is written with a pencil. Look sharp, my boy. What's the matter? You're losing color again."

It was true that Paul Phillips' face was quite white, and his eyes which seemed ready to leap from his head, were staring at the little piece of paper Cantwell's hands were holding on the table.

"That's not Colonel Opal's chirography. He never wrote a line of it!" said Paul, frowning his tongue.

"Whose is it? Do you know?"

"Yes. It is Wilkes Booth's!"

Cantwell's hands left the table; he straightened up and whirled upon Paul.

"Are you sure that Wilkes Booth penned that line?" he asked.

"I am. My brother used to correspond with him. I am familiar with his writing. I would swear to that terrible sentence being from his hand."

Cantwell turned to the paper and read its single line with flashing eyes.

Brief it was:

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN; *Died, March 4, 1865.*"

Paul looked at the detective as if he were trying to intercept the thoughts passing through his brain.

"I'll make that sentence a lie!" grated Cantwell, suddenly, between clenched teeth. "Paul, you go at once to Washington."

"To Washington?"

"To Colonel Baker."

The war detective picked up the startling paper and threw himself into a chair at the table.

Then he drew writing materials to him, and wrote rapidly in cypher for five minutes.

"Now, sir, to Baker!" he said, rising and thrusting what he had written into Paul's hands. "You are not to say a word to any living creature about the contents of the paper I have shown you. Baker will give you something to do till I come. If Wilkes Booth wrote that sentence, there's something in his wild scheme. To Washington!"

Paul concealed the letter for the chief of the secret service beneath his coat, and picked up his hat.

One would think that the two men would have exchanged good-nights, but neither uttered a syllable, and a moment later Cantwell was alone.

As for Paul Phillips, he left the house and stood for a moment on the street in the starlight, as though loth to bid the rebel capital farewell.

"To Washington!" he ejaculated, starting forward. "I have promised to obey Leon's every command, and I'll place the cypher message in Baker's hands, or die."

Those are brave words, Paul Phillips, and thrilling scenes will soon make you recall them a thousand times.

The route to Washington is not strewn with flowers; a trailer is already at your heels.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARCH SCHEMER.

When the war detective's messenger moved off he was watched by the keenest eyes in Richmond.

A little figure clad in men's garments, but with the stealthy tread of a leopard, moved after him from a certain spot, as if it had been waiting for him to emerge from the house.

Paul walked rapidly toward that part of the Confederate capital from whence on several occasions prior to the opening of our story he had made his way to Grant's army, laying active siege to Petersburg.

Not for one moment did the sharp eyes of the tracker lose sight of Paul.

Whenever the young man stopped the trailer stopped also, and when Paul found himself among the suburbs of Richmond his watcher bounded forward with great eagerness.

Then it was that Paul heard his footsteps for the first time, and as he caught a glimpse of the form moving toward him through the starlight, he laid his hand on his revolver.

"Is my mission already known? Can it be that I have been tracked?" he murmured, and then as the advancing person had reached a spot within five feet of him he leveled the weapon and said "halt!" in tones that could not be mistaken.

In obedience to the command his confronter stopped at once, and straightening up made no attempt to draw a firearm.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked Paul.

"My identity I choose to keep to myself," was the quick response. "I want the message you are carrying to Washington."

Paul started.

His resolve flashed across his brain.

What! give up the important message he had been commissioned to bear to Colonel Baker, of the United States secret service? Never!

True to his resolution, he would die first.

"You are not very modest in your demands, it seems to me," said Paul, leaning forward slightly, for he was eager to get a good look at the face before him. "You talk as though I am on my way to Washington with a message, the delivery of which would injure you, or a cause you serve."

"You put it pat, Paul Phillips," was the answer, accompanied by a light laugh. "The message you have is written in cypher; but no matter, I want it just the same."

"You will have to get it if it exists by means I cannot call gentle."

Paul's eyes flashed defiance.

His words were a challenge that could not be misunderstood.

"There may be such a thing as your being mistaken," he went on, seeing that his tracker did not reply immediately. "You address me as Paul Phillips, as if you were certain that I am the owner of that name."

"Come, come! I know a few things of which I am certain," laughed Paul's confronter, not at all dismayed by the menacing revolver at whose trigger the finger of the messenger rested. "You are Paul Phillips, and the message you carry to the Northern capital is intended for Colonel Baker, the chief of Lincoln's detectives. We want it."

"We?" echoed Paul, appearing to start. "A moment ago it was I."

"Listen to me, Paul—"

"I will not! Stand where you are. Since you know me I have a right to send a bullet crashing through your brain."

"Ha! a confession that you are Paul Phillips!" exclaimed the trailer. "If you attempt to leave Richmond to-night you will be captured, if not killed, and the message you bear will secure the detection and death of a dear friend of yours. Ha! do not start and wonder how I know so much. Did not your friend confess to you to-night that he had played the role of Maxon, the Tennessean, a little too well?"

The loyal messenger seemed to recoil.

Cantwell had made such a confession to him, and here was a person, undoubtedly a Confederate, who knew that he (Cantwell) was a Northern spy at the rebel capital.

The thought almost made Paul's finger press the trigger.

"You see I know a few things," the tracker went on, breaking in upon Paul's thoughts. "Give me the message, and proceed to Washington. Refuse, and die. Take your choice."

These words admitted of no double meaning, but Paul Phillips did not hesitate.

"I refuse to obey!" he said, firmly. "If you want the message you say exists you will have to obtain it the best way you can."

He made an effort to move on as he finished.

"Very well, Paul Phillips, you're a fool—a Yankee fool!" said the trailer, derisively. "I don't want your life, but you will soon encounter those who will not hesitate to take it. That message will never lie on Baker's table. Now go and see."

"Forewarned is forearmed; thanks," said Paul, moving off with his face still turned toward his confronter. "If you will give me your name and address, I will send you a message when I get to Washington."

He knew well the road he was traveling, for he had traversed it before, going to and from Grant's army, and had braved its dangers on many occasions.

It is needless to say that his eyes were on the alert, and that the revolver he had drawn on his late tracker he kept cocked in his right hand in order that it might be ready for use at a second's notice.

He believed that his trailer, who appeared to be not only young but very handsome, with an effeminate cast of countenance, had gone back with his report to the person whom he undoubtedly served.

This was true.

While Paul was facing the dangers that lay between him and the Confederate picket lines that compassed Richmond, his trailer was making his way back to the heart of the city proper.

"I wonder what he will say when I report?" the young person said, in audible tones, which were not intended for any other ears than his own. "Will it not hasten his departure from Richmond, and will he not frown at me when I tell him that Paul Phillips is actually on his way to Washington with a message from Silas Cantwell to Baker, his chief? I am not obliged to tell him all. I will report only what I see proper to let out and nothing more. He must not leave Richmond now unless he gives me permission to accompany him."

Ten minutes later the speaker entered a plain frame dwelling in the best built portion of the Confederate city, and walked into the presence of a man writing at a table whose lamp threw a ruddy light over his handsome face.

Handsome, we say.

It was a face of the Doric type, faultless in every respect, and calculated to win at once and retain the admiration of every beholder.

The windows of this beautiful human castle were two dark eyes that were piercing, yet at the same time not harsh in stare nor glance.

They meant, as has been said of them, "to woman, snare, and to man, a search warrant."

A lofty forehead and square brows were adorned with curling hair, dark as the raven's feathers, and a mustache of the same color hid a part of his well-shaped mouth.

This man was well dressed in a suit of dark clothes that fitted to a nicety his well-developed and shapely figure, as it was revealed in the chair.

He looked up, and his eyes shone pleasantly as the door opened, admitting to his presence the young person who had tracked Paul to the suburbs of Richmond; and laying his pen aside he addressed his visitor in that voice which always won those who heard it.

"You are welcome here, Stella," he said. "I have written something here which I will read to you. But why those garments?" and the speaker looked sharply at the clothes, a close-fitting suit of gray, worn by the person before him.

A slight flush reddened the youth's temples.

"I have been working a little, that is all," was the reply. "I will tell you by and by."

The man at the table laughed musically, as he answered:

"You'd make a good Confederate soldier, Stella. But listen to what I have written, and he picked up a sheet of paper on which the ink was hardly dry. "I will not read continuously," he went on; "but only here and there where I think I may have said some forcible things."

His visitor, undoubtedly a beautiful young girl, as the lamp revealed, composed herself to listen with her eyes fastened on his face.

"I have called my paper 'To whom it may concern,'" he said. "Now listen to this my dear Stella:

"I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side I have many friends and everything to make me happy. On the other hand the South has never bestowed upon me one kind word. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I so dearly (although they so widely differ from me in opinion), seems insane; but God is my judge. For be my motive good or bad, I am sure of one thing, the lasting condemnation of the North."

The girl started at the manner in which the last sentence was read, but the reader did not notice her, and went on:

"I love peace more than life. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. I go to see and share the bitter end. They say that the South has found that "last ditch," which the North has so long divided. Should I reach her in safety after my work and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that same ditch by her side."

These words in Stella's handwriting were found in his manifesto after his tragic end. They show the assassin's terrible deliberation months before his crime.

The reader censed and looked over the paper, which he slightly lowered, at his only auditor.

His black eyes glowed with the proud triumph which always heightened his manly beauty.

Stella did not reply until the man exclaimed:

"Have you no comment, no admiration for my composition, Stella?"

The girl left her chair and came to his side.

"You have thought out every sentence," she said, looking down into the face upturned to her. "But it is not too late to burn the paper, and give up the scheme."

That instant Booth's whole look changed.

His brow grew dark as a thundercloud; lightnings seemed to dart from his eyes.

"Stella, you talk to John Wilkes Booth, not to a boy!" he said, madly. "Is this your criticism? Do you advise me to burn this paper and give up my plans—you who have declared that you would die for the South?"

"I do, Wilkes," cried the girl, and her hand fell upon the plotter's shoulder. "I am ready to die for the South; but I am not ready to see you die."

Wilkes Booth laughed.

"The execution of the North will kill no one," he said. "I have gone too far to recede now. I have pledged myself to the South to avenge her wrongs. I have recorded an oath where the record will stand against me forever. You can't turn me back. I swore over the grave of the South's blasted hopes. What is the matter, girl?"

Booth's question was called forth by seeing the girl reeling away without a drop of blood in her face.

Springing up he caught her before she could touch the floor.

"Speak, Stella; speak!" he cried.

The girl's lips parted.

"The widow, Wilkes, the—"

Booth turned like a tiger brought to bay, and holding the girl in his arm, glared at the widow.

What did he see?

Pressed against the pane was a man's face, and as Booth lowered Stella to the floor, a name fell from his lips.

"Silas Cantwell!"

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN A LIE.

Thirty minutes after the occurrence just narrated, Colonel Lovelace Opal, a prominent citizen of Richmond, who was colonel by courtesy only, received a visitor, who was no less a person than Wilkes Booth, the actor—not yet Booth, the assassin.

The hour was late, verging on toward midnight, and Colonel Opal who, although he kept late hours, was about to retire, opened his eyes in astonishment when he saw his caller.

There were traces of some late excitement in Booth's manner, and he attempted to recover his wonted calmness before he spoke.

His first words startled the Confederate citizen.

"I have come to say good-by, colonel. I am going to leave Richmond."

"Going away, Wilkes? Not before morning, I hope—not between two days."

"Between two days, as you call it. Don't you know—no, you don't, for I have not told you what I am going to do. An incident has happened to-night that hastens my departure."

"When will you return?"

"When the South has been avenged!" said Booth, with spirit.

Booth slightly lowered his tone,

"Do you know Silas Cantwell?" he asked.

"The man on Market street? Yes, I know him."

"Well, I want him out of the South's way before I come back."

Colonel Opal's look instantly became a stare.

"Out of the South's way?" he echoed.

"Is he—"

"Yes, he's in it," interrupted Booth. "Stella has discovered a great secret to-night. Silas Cantwell is a member of Lafayette Baker's secret service. He has been six months in Richmond, all the time working for his chief, with whom he has corresponded regularly."

"Great Caesar's ghost!" ejaculated the colonel by courtesy. "Hang me! if I haven't entertained the fellow several times. He plays his part devilish well, if he is a Yankee spy. Hang him? Of course I will! It's all the way I have of getting even with him for pumping me."

"I saw his face to-night. He was at work when I saw it," said Booth. "I at once recognized in him an old friend whom I used to call Leon Lennox, which I believe to be his right name. I will not stand between him and the gallows."

"It wouldn't do him any good if you did, Wilkes!" cried the

colonel, resolutely. "If you are determined to leave Richmond you can set out with the assurance that Silas Cantwell, the Yankee agent, will be attended to with neatness and dispatch. He'll never get to make his report, or my name's not Lovelace Opal!"

"Don't spoil matters by being too fast," advised the plotter. "Unless Silas Cantwell, as I chose to call him, is put out of the way at once, the South may never be avenged. I leave all with you, colonel. You know your duty, and future generations will curse you if you do it not."

"I shall not fail," was the reassuring reply. "I don't know what you are going to do. Wilkes: but whatever it is, do it well." Booth's eyes glauced.

"Well done it shall be!" he said, holding out his hand. "I go back to those who will help me carry out my scheme. The greatest scheme afoot will thrive henceforward in the shadow of the Northern capital. Listen for news from the North, colonel. The idea of March are going to be fatal to the modern Caesar. Don't forget my last injunction, colonel. Attend to Silas Cantwell. He's a poisonous weed that has thrived too long on Southern soil."

The Confederate citizen wrung Booth's hand cordially, and followed him to the door after he had dropped it.

"I think if you suddenly call the spy Leon Lennox, he will start and betray himself," he said.

"Watch him carefully when you speak the name, colonel. His messenger will never deliver the cypher he started off with to-night!"

"Did he send a messenger from Richmond?"

"Yes, but don't let that fellow trouble you. You are to look after Silas Cantwell. The message will never reach Baker."

Booth crossed the threshold as the last word fell from his lips, and having again bade him good-by, Colonel Opal turned back into his house.

"Hang me, if I wouldn't like to know just what kind of a plot that fellow is hatching," he said, to himself. "He doesn't part with all his secrets, as I discover, although he leads one up to them sometimes. The South has suffered and is to be avenged; that's the burden of his song. I never thought that Wilkes Booth would undertake a scheme as dark as the one he talks about seems to be. If he would listen to that girl, who would die for him, he could make himself the happiest man in all creation; but he wants fame—fame! By Jove! he may get the rope and infamy, if he doesn't mend his ways. Let me see: what am I to do? Oh, yes, I'm expected to have Silas Cantwell hanged before he gets back. Silas Cantwell a Yankee agent? Well, I don't know. It takes a good deal of grit for a Northern agent to live six months in Richmond; but Silas Cantwell's expressionless face and cold eyes were not made to be owned by a coward. Wilkes has pitted me against that man, eh? What are you going to do with the job, colonel?"

Before Colonel Opal answered the self put question, he consulted a well stocked sideboard, from whose contents he selected some liquor, that added a new sparkle to his eyes.

"I am going to obey, Wilkes," he said, replacing the decanter on its accustomed shelf. "I have made up my mind that Silas Cantwell shall never present his report to his chief."

This resolve was easily made, although the maker might experience difficulty in carrying it out.

Colonel Opal had never married, although his large wealth, and not his face, which was not very handsome, had attracted many marriageable ladies.

His house was one of the finest dwellings in the rebel capital, and was always open to those who loved the cause almost lost.

Colonel Opal knew where the war detective dwelt, for on one occasion a few days prior to the opening of our story, he had visited Cantwell at home, and enjoyed a chat with the spy whom he did not then suspect.

"Grass mustn't grow under one's feet these times," he said, to himself, as he selected a revolver from among a dozen weapons, shortly after Booth's departure. "By Jove! it's past midnight now; but what of that? I must first find whether Silas is at home, and then I will strike the killing blow. What excuse can I have for disturbing him at this hour? Ah, yes; he said when we parted last, that if I received any communication from Judge Tazewell about that cotton, I should inform him at once. That will do. I can fix up a story between here and his house."

Ah! if Silas Cantwell had known the danger that menaced him when Colonel Opal left his own home to spy out his whereabouts at that time!

Would he not have shaken the dust of Richmond from his feet and turned his face at once toward Washington?

Pope says that:

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate."

And it seemed as if it was not to be opened to the fearless detective until Colonel Opal's lips had pronounced his doom.

To a man who had spent thirty years in Richmond as the colonel had done, the dimly lighted streets at night did not form a con-

fusing labyrinth, and he hurried toward that part of the city where the suspected man had taken up his residence.

Booth, the colonel thought, had already started for Washington, and he, the colonel, would do his duty before day.

"Therefore, when he halted in front of the war detective's quarters, he was quite calm, had a story made up about the cotton in which Cantwell seemed deeply interested, and was eager to bring matters to a crisis.

"Here goes for it," he said, in the voice of a man who has great confidence in his abilities as he seized the bell knob and jerked it sharply.

"Is that you, colonel?" suddenly asked a voice in his rear, and Lovelace Opal, wheeling at the question, found Cantwell standing on the sidewalk before him, as large as life.

"Walk in and we will talk," he said, unlocking the door and ushering the Confederate citizen into the hall. "A letter from the judge, eh? That's encouraging."

Colonel Opal entered a room with the spy, where a lamp was burning on a table.

"These cotton transactions and other matters keep one out late," continued Cantwell, looking straight into Opal's eyes. "When did your letter arrive, colonel?"

"To-night. It came through by the underground mail."

"When was it dated?"

"On the third."

"This is the ninth. Are you sure of the date, colonel?"

"I am."

"It was in the judge's handwriting?"

"Yes."

"Have you the letter with you?"

"No. I thought I had until I reached your doorstep, when I discovered I had left it at home. I can state the substance, however—"

"Oh, that's not necessary," interrupted Cantwell, with a wave of the hand. "Your letter puzzles me, colonel."

"Puzzles you? How so?"

"Because it was written on the third, and Judge Tazewell died on the twenty-ninth preceding it!"

A bombshell seemed to have dropped at Colonel Opal's feet.

There was a derisive smile at the corners of the war detective's mouth, and triumph and defiance in his eye.

"Yes, my dear colonel, the judge departed this life on the twenty-ninth, so you must have received a letter from his spirit!" said Cantwell.

It was a polite way of telling Colonel Opal that he had lied.

For a moment longer the cornered colonel sat in his chair, then he leaped to his feet.

"I'll give you a passport to his spirit, then, Leon Lennox!" he exclaimed, and before the detective could lift a hand or leave his chair, the giant colonel fell upon him with the force and ferocity of a lion.

It was a terrible collision, and the two men went thunderously to the floor together!

CHAPTER V.

OWING AN ENEMY.

The war detective found himself in the clutches of a man who was more than his equal in strength.

"Don't you see that I know you?" grated Colonel Opal. "I don't call you Silas Cantwell, but Leon Lennox. You've been having a fine time in Richmond during the past six months, confound you? I've suspected you all along (which was not true); but I bided my time until I had gathered testimony enough to hang you. My time has come at last. The Yankee detective chief is about to lose one of his ablest assistants, for I proclaim, here, Mr. Lennox, that you're going to die, sir, before the South sees that last ditch the North prates so much about; yes, sir, your days are numbered, sir!"

This intelligence did not have a pleasant sound for the loyal detective's ears.

He ceased to struggle, for the ponderous form of the colonel by courtesy was upon him, and one of the Confederate's hands was at his throat, and almost choking him into unconsciousness.

"Do you surrender?" resumed Colonel Opal. "You see that I hold the best hand, Lennox. If you give up I'll take my tiger claws from your throat. There! you can talk now!"

At that moment Colonel Opal's grip relaxed enough to let Cantwell find his tongue again, if he wished to use that important member; but for a minute the detective did not speak.

"Your action convinces me that you have no letter from Judge Tazewell about the cotton," he said, calmly, looking Opal squarely in the face.

"I would say so myself. I knew all the time that the judge was dead.

"But thought I did not know it, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"You took the risk and lost, colonel," the detective smiled, faintly. "You see I get letters by the secret mail as well as other people. But let us come to other matters. I am your prisoner, if I look at this affair in the same light you do."

"I consider you so."

"Well, what are you going to do with me?"

Colonel Opal made no immediate reply.

It then began to dawn upon him that he probably had an elephant on his hands.

He had captured Cantwell in the later's own quarters, and there was no one near to help take the prisoner to confinement.

He thought he detected in the prisoner's question a tone of defiance which irritated him.

"You have arrested me for being what you have pleased to term an agent of the North," continued Cantwell. "That is a bold charge, colonel. I would like to see your proofs. Of course you would not arrest me without something tangible to substantiate the charges you have preferred against me."

"Proof?" echoed the Confederate, in a dazed sort of way. "Proof? We'll bring forward enough of it at the right time. I say again that you are Leon Lennox, not Silas Cantwell. By Jove! you may be Maxon, the Tennessean, for aught I know."

Colonel Opal expected to see the detective start at mention of the last name, but he did not.

"I must be a man of many names if I am to believe my accusers," he merely said, a bit of merriment in his voice. "But a truce to all this! Since I am to consider myself under arrest, I desire at once to be confronted by the proof of which you have spoken. I demand to be conveyed at once into the presence of Jefferson Davis."

Colonel Opal started.

"Mr. Davis and I are friends," continued Cantwell. "I am at present in his private employ, as I would speedily convince you in an interview. The hour is late, I know, and the president has doubtless retired; but as your action is interfering with certain work I am now doing for him, I demand to be taken to his mansion at once."

The Confederate citizen seemed staggered at these words.

He began to think that after all Booth might have been hasty in accusing Cantwell of being Leon Lennox, and a spy of the North.

If he was guilty, why would he demand to be taken to President Davis, the highest authority in the Confederate capital, and a man who at that time was very anxious to rid Richmond of everything not rebel?

"Read that, sir!" said Cantwell, proudly, breaking in upon his captor's speculations by flinging a letter upon the table. "As a true Confederate, as I know you to be, you will not believe that Mr. Davis himself would be likely to entrust a mission of great importance to the cause to a Northern spy. That letter, sir, is a part of my defence."

Cantwell eyed Opal closely, as the latter unfolded and read the letter, which we laid before the reader in our first chapter.

He was well acquainted with the rebel president's chirography, and saw at once that the document he held in his hand was genuine.

When he looked up, Cantwell's keen eyes saw that the man was doubting.

"Come, colonel, confess that you have acted hastily, or conduct me to Mr. Davis, so that by a word he can set all your doubts at rest. I'll get my hat and—"

Cantwell had left his chair in which he had seated himself after rising from the floor, and was moving across the room when Colonel Opal with voice and spring broke his sentence.

"One minute," he said, laying his hand on the detective's shoulder, which made him turn, bringing the two men face to face again. "I cannot think of disturbing the president at this hour."

"Not when justice demands a hearing?" cried Cantwell, his eyes flashing madly. "Not when a citizen of Richmond is accused of being a Yankee spy? Sir, I go to the president whether you will or not."

His demeanor, so much like that of a man falsely accused, made Colonel Opal recoil a pace.

"Will not to-morrow do?" he asked.

"To-morrow! Were you in my place, Colonel Opal, would you rest a minute under this terrible accusation? Think of this. You owe me a chance to clear myself if I can. Conduct me at once to Mr. Davis, or acknowledge that you have taken a hasty and ill-advised step to-night. Out of respect to you I will call it nothing more."

"I will admit, Mr. Cantwell—it was not 'Leon Lennox' this time—that we sometimes go a little fast when reflection would advise a more judicious gait," said the colonel, coloring. "My hesitancy in disturbing the president at this late hour forces me to acknowledge that I may have acted without sufficient discretion. To-morrow, if you will, I will be ready to secure you the interview you now demand."

"That's not it!" ejaculated Cantwell, almost before the last word had left the Confederate's tongue. "To-morrow is not now. I will not rest under the imputation you have cast upon me. Acknowledgment, or an interview. Take your choice, colonel."

Colonel Opal hit his lip under his drooping mustache.

"My informant may have been mistaken—"

"Where is he? Confront me with him, if you dare!"

"That cannot be done to-night."

"His name, then?"

The Confederate hesitated.

What! reveal the name of Wilkes Booth to Cantwell?

No; he could not do that; and Booth, he knew, had announced his intention of leaving Richmond that night.

At that very moment he might be beyond the suburbs of the rebel capital.

Cantwell saw the colonel's hesitancy, and with a sneer that cut the haughty Southerner to the quick, turned on his heel.

"No more!" he exclaimed. "This whole thing is a dastardly, put-up job in which I never thought a gentleman of Colonel Opal's standing would take a hand. I am accused, proof is talked about, and yet I cannot be confronted with the accuser. Colonel Opal, this interview is at an end. By Heaven, sir, were it not for the respect I entertain toward you as one of Mr. Davis's friends, I'd call you to account for your treatment of Silas Cantwell in his own house to-night."

"I beg of you to let the matter rest here," interrupted Colonel Opal. "I assure you, sir, that it shall go no further."

"You do, perhaps, but the man who conceived the whole plot?"

"I will speak for him. He shall stop where he is."

"Very well," said Cantwell, after a minute of apparently sage reflection. "Against my will, I let the matter drop."

"And are you friends?"

Colonel Opal held out his hand.

"That depends on yourself," was the reply.

The two men touched hands, and the Confederate picked up his hat.

Three minutes later the war detective was the only occupant of the room in which the scenes we have described had taken place.

"Things are getting too hot for me in Richmond," he said to himself. "My boldness alone saved my neck to-night. With other men I might not have succeeded so well; but the colonel is vulnerable. Ha! don't I know who put him on my trail? He lied when he said he had suspected me all along. He never dreamed that I was one of Baker's men until Wilkes Booth whispered it in his ear since sundown. The fellow recognized me at the window of his quarters to-night. He called me Silas Cantwell, but I saw by his look that he knows I am Leon Lennox, and the secret agent of the Union. So you have written Abraham Lincoln's obituary, Wilkes Booth? Ha! I will have you know that while I am able to thwart your infernal conspiracy, the dagger will not do its work. What! Lincoln to be assassinated on the threshold of peace? No! that shall never be."

As Cantwell finished, he donned his hat and changing his garments for others that quite altered his appearance, he left the house, locking the door behind him.

He went straight to a dwelling at one of the windows of which he had already startled Wilkes Booth that night.

A weird stillness brooded over the scene, and the house itself was shrouded in gloom.

The war detective seemed the only person near, and his figure was scarcely distinguishable from the darkness while he stood on the steps as if he shrank from entering.

"I might as well learn something before it is too late," he suddenly ejaculated, and the next moment he inserted a little piece of pliable steel into the lock.

After a few twists he opened the door noiselessly, and crept into the place.

Darkness, which could be felt almost, reigned in the corridor which he had invaded; but he found a door to his right.

A moment later he stood in the room where he had last seen Booth.

Then he took a dark lantern from beneath his coat and cautiously threw its light around the room.

"Just as I expected," he murmured. "The modern Cassius has suddenly changed his quarters. In other words, I have found the nest, but the bird has deserted it."

There were numerous evidences of sudden flight.

The table had been cleared of papers, a few of which seemed to have been destroyed, for there were numerous scraps among the ancient ashes in the fire-place.

"This may prove a mine," remarked Cantwell, bending over the confused mass and beginning to transfer it to one of his pockets.

"I'll work on them before I leave Richmond."

He did not pause until he held possession of the last scrap, and when he turned to leave there was a look of triumph in his eyes.

"I trust Paul will have no trouble in getting through," he said, his thoughts at that moment being with the young man he had

sent that night to Washington. "Baker will receive Wilkes Booth with open arms when he gets to the capital!"

So saying, Cantwell closed the slide of his lantern and left the chamber lately occupied by Booth.

When he reached the steps before the house, he locked the door by means of the false key and started off.

"Halt there!"

Thrilled to his very soul, the war detective wheeled, with his hand on his revolver, to confront the speaker.

"I thought it was you," said a voice, as a figure rose out of the almost rayless gloom. "I want to warn you now, Leon Lennox, that unless you give up your present plans, your life will not be worth a farthing. Be warned in time. That's all!"

The speaker wheeled to depart, but the detective's hand clutched his shoulder.

"And I tell you, Wilkes Booth, that unless you put me out of your road, you'll never succeed in your damnable plots!" he grated.

The reply was a cold, cutting, and defiant laugh, and the loyal detective saw the great conspirator vanish, leaving him the sole occupant of the spot.

CHAPTER VI.

AT WORK IN WASHINGTON.

The month of February was drawing to a close, and all Washington was preparing for Lincoln's second inauguration.

The rebellion was about to collapse, and men were already talking of reconstruction.

Grant was pushing Lee to the last wall, and Sherman having thundered across Georgia, was about to give Johnston's legions the coup de grace.

Peace was about to bless the land!

Abraham Lincoln, who had borne the heavy sorrows of the long conflict, and tasted few joys during all that time, was from the windows of his magnanimous soul looking toward the smoky horizon, above which he felt would soon soar the angel of peace.

No man had deplored the war more than he, and no heart in all the nation had bled oftener, or been wounded deeper than the one in his bosom.

One night, after the long, cooling shadows had settled down over the White House, a veiled woman presented herself at the main entrance, and requested an interview with the president.

"When will he be at leisure?" she asked, in a voice that breathed of deep disappointment.

"No more to-night, miss," answered the man, slightly emphasizing the last word, as if he wished the caller to know that, despite her veil, he had discovered her social title.

"No more to-night!" was the echo.

"But I must see him. I must have an interview with the president."

"I regret to say that you must postpone it. The president's inauguration is approaching, and he finds a great deal to engross his attention."

The veiled woman started.

"His second inauguration, yes," she exclaimed. "That is why I want to see him. This is the last day of February. I will wait out yonder until the cabinet meeting ends."

The woman nodded toward the garden as she finished, but the man said firmly:

"It will be a long wait, I am afraid. Mr. Lincoln cannot be seen to-night. I am sorry, and I must tell you that people found in the grounds at night are apt to be disturbed by the capitol police."

The veiled visitor stood still for a moment.

"I am willing to be subjected to arrest if I could only see the president," she pleaded, after a moment's silence.

"Does he know you, miss?"

"Alas! no. He has never so much as heard of me. Must I go, then, without seeing him? Must I depart without doing him the service which lies so near my heart? Do any people ever come here to warn the president that his life is in danger?"

"A great many. He receives many letters threatening assassination, and warning him to be on his guard," said the man, smiling.

"What does he say to such visitors?" asked the visitor, eagerly.

"He listens to all and dismisses them with a promise that seems to satisfy them. Some of the communications he turns over to Colonel Baker, chief of the secret service; but for the most part he destroys them himself."

The woman seemed to be repulsed, but she suddenly replied, with increasing warmth.

"He would more than listen to me—I know he would! Why can't I see him to-night? Life is uncertain. I may not live till to-morrow. Say," laying her hand on the official's arm, "relax your iron rules for me. Let me see the president after the consul-

tation has broken up. You don't know what I know; you cannot!"

"Indeed, miss, you try me, but I cannot give assent," was the reply. "Come to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"To-morrow may be eternity, but I will come," said the strange visitor, giving the man a long look through her veil ere she turned away.

She was watched by the guardian of the door until her figure, which indicated both youth and beauty, was lost among the shadows of night. Then, with secretly a thought of her, he turned to other duties.

"Must I carry this bitter secret in my breast till another dawn?" ejaculated the baffled visitor, as she struck Pennsylvania avenue with its varied life, which extended to the capitol itself. "I can save two lives by warning the president of the awful danger that threatens him. His death will do the South no good, and the expiring cause has no truer adherent than me. My love for our nation makes me throw myself at the feet of the person he calls his enemy—a person whose life he wants; and when does he intend to take it? On the day when he is expected to stand before his people, and take the oath of office for four years more. Oh, Heaven! why was I ever intrusted with his dark secret? Ah! yonder he is now."

The woman halted and crept close to the tree near which she now stood, but kept her eyes fixed upon a handsome young man who stood in the light of a lamp a few feet away, with his eyes turned toward the president's mansion.

"It is he—Wilkes," she continued, watching him intently. "What if he should find me here; but he will not do that! How landsome, how kingly he is, and yet he would commit a crime that would consign him and his name forever to the lowest depths of infamy! Thank Heaven! he is moving off without having seen me! Oh, Wilkes! would to God that I could change your thoughts, that I could stay your hand and keep you for me and the world that honors you for your talents. It must be done! The president will listen to me; I know he will. He will do more than listen—he will act!"

By this time the person called Wilkes by the woman in the shadow of the tree had moved off, and was already lost in the crowd of people that swept over the pavements.

"I will go home and wait till morning," she continued. "What would he say if he knew I was in Washington? I trust he will not discover me until I have saved them both."

Did the woman notice a man who at that moment had two ferocious eyes upon her? Did she hear the cat-like tread, or see the bounding figure that moved after her when she went away toward that part of the capital where rolled the waters of the Potomac?

She noticed not the noiseless tracker.

Down more than one street, some of them dimly lighted, she led the human bloodhound, whose evil eyes did not lose sight of her for a second.

That same man, lying on the grass before the White House, had listened to her conversation with the usher; not a word had escaped his keen ears.

Throw the light of day upon that man, reader, and you would see a well built body, broad shoulders, and a hand that seemed made to wield a dirk. His face was hard, like bronze, and his eyes possessed the cold look of the professional thug's, and a thug that trailer was.

He was dressed that night as he appeared a few days afterward when his name had been made known to the world by a deed that made it shudder.

At last the president's caller entered a small frame house, the door of which she unlocked with a key which she found under the step at a place where she knew where to look for it.

A pantherish bound carried the tracker to the door almost before she could close it, and his eyes glittered triumphantly when he failed to hear the key growl in the lock.

At last a light was seen in one of the upper windows, for the house boasted of two stories, although it was not a pretentious structure.

Scarcely had he discovered the light, ere he tried the door. It yielded as he knew it would, for it had not been locked.

With the tread of the practised house-breaker, he entered, found the stair up which the woman had lately crept, and began to ascend.

At the head of those gloomy steps he saw a door slightly ajar, and beyond it the figure of a female at a table.

For a moment the man feasted his eyes on the sight, then covering the space with two strides, he pushed the door open with his murderous hand.

Unfortunately for President Lincoln's night visitor, the door uttered no sound as it opened, and the man glided across the room and leaned over the woman's shoulder.

His eyes followed the pen she was moving across the paper in front of her.

How they glittered as he gazed at the writing which was beautiful, like the chirography of a cultivated woman.

His presence, hideous as it was, was not suspected by the writer; the lamp that afforded light for the labor threw a pair of shadows on the wall; but she saw them not.

All at once the brawny hand of the man was lifted, and the next moment it fell upon the woman's shoulder.

The response was a wild cry, and the woman sprang up and whirled upon the human panther.

"You here?" she demanded, with flashing eyes and crimsoned face. "Who are you, and what right have you to invade my home?"

Before the tracker replied, he glanced at the sheet half written over on the table.

Then he said:

"You are going to give the whole thing away."

The woman started as if a sentence of death had unexpectedly rang in her ears.

"Don't lie to me, girl," continued the Washington thug, advancing upon her as a tiger approaches his victim. "You have been to the White House, but they would not let you in, so you come here and write out the secret to send to Lincoln if he refuses to admit you to-morrow. We can't be trifled with at this stage of the game. You know how traitors are punished."

He pounced upon her with the last word, and before she could lift a hand, his fingers encircled her arm, and seemed to burn their way to the bone.

"Who are you?" gasped the girl, her veil off now, revealing a beautiful face but divested of all color.

"Who am I? It wouldn't do you any good to know," was the reply. "But I don't mind telling you, seeing that you're not going to trouble us to-night. I'm the helper of the man you would send to the gallows. I am Wilkes' friend. We're all in the same boat, Stella, for you see I know your name. If we are to hang we'll all hang together; but not by your treachery. I'm going to kill you."

The woman did not shriek at this awful announcement; she could not, for the hand of the assassin was at her swan-like throat.

He lifted her by main strength from the floor; her eyes seemed to start from her head.

"Wilkes and I don't allow no interferers," he went on. "All Heaven shall not keep us from beheading the Yankee government."

An hour later a boat coming from the middle of the Potomac reached the shore, and a man sprang out and landed some feet beyond the tide.

An exclamation of satisfaction fell from his lips.

"I found her just in time. Her lips are sealed forever!" he said.

It was Stella's merciless tracker.

What had he done with President Lincoln's nocturnal visitor?

CHAPTER VII.

STRIKING THE OLD TRAIL.

On the morning of March 1, 1865, the chief usher of the White House watched in vain for the veiled visitor whom he had refused to admit to Mr. Lincoln's presence the night before.

She did not come.

If her tracker had given her body to the waves of the Potomac, the secret which she might have divulged would perhaps remain a secret forever.

Stella, the reader will recollect, was the woman seen with Booth in Richmond the night that witnessed the events detailed in the first chapters of our romance.

She had followed him to Washington—for what?

Ah! who shall say that the great plotter of the age had not inspired love in the heart of that fair young girl?

Certain it was that she knew Booth's designs against Lincoln, for prior to the date of our story, the conspirators had given up all hopes of kidnapping the president, and had resolved to take his life.

When?

If not on March 4, the day of his second inauguration as president, why was Stella so eager to see the doomed ruler before that day?

Witness the piece of paper which Cantwell, the war detective, showed to Paul Phillips in Richmond, the paper which read: "Abraham Lincoln—died, March 4, 1865."

Why not March 4?

That day would be likely for several reasons to be chosen by the cabal.

The forenoon of March 1 slipped away, and when the sun reached the meridian the White House usher ceased to look longer for the veiled woman—Stella.

The president had many callers, but she was not among them.

Among the visitors was a man with a red beard, who would have attracted attention anywhere.

His "searching eyes of spotted gray" seemed to see every face in the crowd through which he passed to the president who occupied at that time the long room in which he had passed so many weary days.

This visitor was Colonel Lafayette Baker, the chief of the secret service, and the man who was soon to become the president's avenger.

"You're the very man I've been waiting for, Baker," said Lincoln, a pleasant smile illumining his careworn countenance the moment his eyes caught sight of the detective. Some one must have told you my desires. Baker, the White House had a visitor last night who was not allowed to see me. She was very desirous of having an interview with me, and promised to call this morning at ten. She has not come, and I am a little concerned about her. From what the officer on duty at the time tells me I am convinced that she had a warning of some kind to impart. Perhaps she has called on you?"

"She has not Mr. President. How was she dressed?"

"In plain black, and closely veiled," replied Lincoln. "Somehow or other, I would like to see her. I don't know why, but she was so anxious to see me."

Seeing the interest the president took in the strange woman, Baker promised to find her if possible, and Lincoln urged him to do so, adding that he was afraid something had happened her.

Colonel Baker was familiar with the people who were constantly warning the president of danger.

On several occasions he had shown Mr. Lincoln threatening letters, only to hear him say:

"I don't see what they want to kill me for, Baker; they might get a worse man."

He did not take much stock in the veiled woman; he placed her in the same category with other females who had intruded themselves upon the president to unfold some horrid dream of murder, and bid him beware for his life.

"I won't run my men to death after her, that's certain," said Baker, to himself, as he left the White House. "I've got other things on my mind. I wonder what has become of Lennox?"

He had scarcely asked himself this question ere a man stepped from the shadow of a tree in front of the presidential mansion, and by a single look attracted his attention.

"Lennox now!" exclaimed the detective chief, and the next moment the two men stood face to face.

"By Jove! I just asked myself what had become of you," continued Baker. "I haven't heard from you for a long time."

If the man was Leon Lennox, or Silas Cantwell, as we best know him, he did not start, but merely said:

"This is the first of March."

"That is true," said the chief.

"Well, what have you done? You got cipher number twenty-six."

"I got number twenty-five."

"And not twenty-six?"

"I never saw it."

"Nor Paul?"

"Nor Paul."

Despite his public surroundings, Cantwell threw his hand to his forehead, and kept it there for a second.

"I started Paul and the message from Richmond on the night of the ninth of February. Can it be that neither reached you?"

"I have not seen them. Come to the office."

Not another word was spoken until the two men were seated in Colonel Baker's private office.

"You can proceed now, Lennox," said Baker. "Your last cipher dispatch was dated at Richmond, on the first of February. What has happened since then?"

Cantwell started as though the voice of one long dead had spoken.

"I'd rather not stop to tell you all now, colonel," he said, in tones barely his own. "I've had adventures since then, scores of them. I've been kidnaped, and the inmate of a dungeon, dark as the Egyptian darkness of old, and twice as foul."

"In Richmond?"

"God knows where it was, but I think it wasn't a thousand miles from Jeff Davis' mansion," said the war detective, with a grim smile. "I'm here in Washington now—in God's country again—and I'm thankful for it. Let me postpone my narrative. I sent some news in the dispatch intrusted to Paul; but never mind it now. Three days hence the president is to be inaugurated."

"Yes."

"I'll find them all, Paul! the lost dispatch, and the others!" cried Cantwell, leaving his chair. "I swore to get even with them when I couldn't see my hand before my face. By Heaven! I'll make that obituary notice the blackest lie ever penned! I told him he'd have to kill me if he wanted to succeed, and he hasn't done it yet."

From under his reddish eyebrows Baker eyed Cantwell with an expression that tried to read his secret thoughts.

"What do you mean, sir?" he asked, almost sternly.

"Let me answer you later," was the reply. "I haven't been in Washington six hours, but they're all here. I'll bet my life on that. I will strike the trail before morning, and one pretty little scheme I know of will gang sglee, or my name's not Leon Lennox, of the secret service. I have but one question to ask you, colonel. Is Wilkes Booth, the actor, in Washington?"

"I saw him yesterday on the avenue."

"That's all. Good-day, colonel. I will report success before long."

Without giving Baker a chance to reply, Cantwell vanished through the officer's door.

"Don't I know that they're all here?" he said, to himself, when on the street. "They've laid their plans for the fourth of March; but, by the eternal! I'm here to crush them all."

Cantwell passed rapidly down the street watched by a man who appeared to be a street loafer.

"When did the grave give you up, Silas Cantwell?" muttered the detective's watcher. "I've got another job on my hands, I see. I got away with a traitress last night; to-night I will attend to a man spy. Your days are numbered, Silas Cantwell."

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL'S ADVENTURES.

If Paul Phillips had not reached Washington with the important cipher message intrusted to his care by the war detective, what had become of him?

When we saw him last he was attempting to leave Richmond by a route which he had traveled before, and a route with which he was well acquainted.

At last he had the city in his rear, and for the first time since leaving, Silas Cantwell, as we prefer to call the war detective, he breathed free.

Paul stood in a road which was illy bordered by a few trees, whose lowest limbs were beyond his reach, and as he listened, he heard the approach of a body of cavalry.

To step behind the nearest tree was the work of an instant, and with his hand at his revolver, which he had resolved not to use except in the case of extreme danger, the detective's messenger waited for the troop.

Presently their outlines loomed up between the young loyalist and the scintillating stars, and the next moment instead of passing the tree, as he had expected, the foremost drew rein and said, laughingly to his twenty companions:

"It's not a case of life and death, boys. Let's stop here awhile and rest. We're not bound to get to Richmond before daylight, if I understand the orders; so, what's the difference?"

"Let's have a light and a game!" suddenly exclaimed one of the troopers. "Thar's plenty of wood under the tree. I've got a few Yankee dollars to lose before we see Richmond."

How eagerly Paul watched the trooper.

Not for a single moment did he take his eyes from him, for step by step he came nearer on his wood-gathering expedition.

All at once the Union messenger shrank back, for the rebel's hand had actually touched his arm.

"I've got to make a dash for liberty," he said to himself.

"The following instant he rose so suddenly before the Confederate, that the latter taken by surprise dropped his wood, and recoiled with a frightening cry.

"This was exactly what Paul did not want! however, he tried to make the best of a bad bargain.

Fearful that the trooper would alarm his companions with a louder cry, he leaped boldly forward and sent him staggering away by a well aimed blow which broke an exclamation that would have sealed his own doom.

He sprang forward.

"Hold on, Bill," said a voice, at his elbow, and a thrill went to Paul's heart as a hand fell on his shoulder. "Who's that you jes' struck?"

Paul wheeled with the intention of treating the speaker in a like manner, but before he could lift his hand he was discovered with an oath, and the hand flew instantly from his shoulder to his throat.

"Hyer, boys, I've caught something," called out the cavalryman to his comrades, and in less than a minute Paul found himself surrounded by the entire troop save the one he had knocked senseless.

A dozen matches served as torches till better ones could be obtained, which was within a few moments.

"Another Yankee spy," fell upon Paul's ears. "By George! we've made a lucky halt. I say, pard, show up, or we'll 'sarel you much to yer disadvantage."

"Strip him, boys," said the leader of the squad in reply to Paul's arguments. "Ef he resists we'll search him dead."

The revolver that covered him probably influenced Paul, for he divested himself of his coat which he handed to his captors.

It was speedily searched as far as the pockets were concerned, and his jacket, the treasury of his wardrobe, was subjected to a like test.

"Now yer boots! You know what the Continentals found in Major Andre's, pard—enough to hang him."

Paul pulled off his boots, then his socks, in neither of which anything was found.

His captors looked puzzled.

"Go over 'em agin, boys. You've missed the dispatches," said the leader. "This man is a Yankee spy."

Paul was ordered to divest himself of the last vestige of clothing, which he did, and saw it subjected to a rigid scrutiny.

The cipher message was still safe.

One by one Paul was permitted to don his garments again.

"It's somewhar about 'im—I know it," persisted the head Confederate. "Ef the back of thar jacket is double cut it open."

Paul started at the command, and the garment which he was about to don, thankful that Cantwell's message had been saved, was jerked from his hands.

"It's double, cap'n."

"Cut it open!"

In less than a minute, and before Paul's eyes, a knife was applied to the back of the garment.

He saw the cipher message deposited carefully in the pocket of the leader of the squad, and five minutes later he was mounted and on his way back to Richmond.

Before the night waned he found himself in Richmond again, and instead of being far from the Confederate capital and on the road to Washington, as he had hoped to be at that hour, he was the occupant of a room on the first floor, guarded by he knew not how many rebel shoulders.

It was not far from sundown again ere the young man was visited in prison.

Then he was taken out and escorted, closely guarded, to General Beauregard's headquarters, where he was confronted by the general himself and several other officers.

The first thing Paul saw was his dispatch lying open on the table.

"Read that paper," said Beauregard, pushing the message toward Paul.

"I can't," was the quick reply.

"Ha! you did not write it, then?"

Paul was silent, with the eyes of the Confederates fixed upon him.

"I'll never betray, Leon," he said to himself.

The next moment Beauregard cut the silence sharply.

"I give you till morning to decipher that dispatch, young man," he said. "If you refuse, we'll pull you up. Take him back, captain."

CHAPTER IX.

PAUL RUNS FOR LIFE.

Paul went back to prison with the last words of General Beauregard ringing in his ears.

He found the place as comfortless as he had left it, and when the door closed behind him, the almost hopeless situation that faced him struck a chill to his heart.

More than once during the moments that passed over his head after his return to the prison, Paul thought of Cantwell.

Where was the war detective, and was he aware of the peril that menaced his messenger?

More than once Paul asked himself this question, but the walls by which he was surrounded returned no answer.

Then another person entered his mind, the veiled woman who had brought Cantwell information about the wild scheme that burned in Wilkes Booth's brain.

Pauline, she called herself, and he had seen her face only to start and recognize a friend, who, years before, had been his school-mate, a young girl named Pauline Dupont, his first love, and the first woman with whom he had quarreled.

Was it not strange that they should meet amid the excitement of war in the capital of the Confederacy, he the messenger of a loyal detective, a spy himself, and she—he dared not think who she might be.

Years before he had lost sight of Pauline Dupont; after the quarrel they had drifted apart, although he believed that she secretly loved him.

He could not take the girl from his mind; she seemed with him in the prison, and while he stood at the one small grated window, in the gathering shadows of night, he relieved the days of his youth and enjoyed the scenes for years forgotten.

So intense were his thoughts concerning the past, that he, for the time being, forgot his situation, and the danger that faced him was kept aloof by thoughts of Pauline Dupont, found after so long a time.

All at once Paul started, for something thrown from the street pelted past his cheek, and he turned to see a ball of paper on the floor.

Night had fallen over the Confederate capital, and he had not caught a glimpse of the thrower of the ball.

His hand closed about it with an eagerness that almost brought a cry to his lips.

He was certain it had been thrown into the room by a friend, but by whom?

He thought of Cantwell.

"Ah! he has heard of my misfortune," said Paul, to himself, "and he is going to render me some assistance."

He went back to the window with the prize, which he began to inspect at once.

He discovered that the outside of the ball was composed of the fragment of a newspaper, but within was a message traced on the half of a small letter sheet.

An expression of disappointment overspread Paul's countenance when he found that he could not read the message for the night, but he strained his eyes trying to do so until the balls burned in his head like globes of fire.

"To ask for a light would be to betray my friend," he said; "but I must master this message!"

Paul, in his desperation, searched his clothing well.

He had matches when he was captured, but they had been taken from him.

A hole in his pocket led him to hope that the find would not prove a bootless one, and when he at last grasped a little piece of wood and drew it out, he could hardly repress a cry, for it was the head of a Lucifer match!

Paul sprang to one corner of his prison and knelt down with his back toward the window.

Then he drew the bit of match along the floor, and was rewarded with the appearance of a flame.

The message had been smoothed out before hand, and his eyes were ready to master it.

The reader can imagine the feelings of the young man when he bent to his task.

It was not a hopeless one, for in a moment, as it were, Paul with the aid of the match, had read the following:

"Send word to Beauregard at once that you will translate the cipher at his headquarters. A guard will come for you. There will be a demonstration at a certain alley. Leap away, and run down it to a gate which you will find open. It is your only hope. A FRIEND."

The match went out and left Paul in darkness again, just as he reached the common place signature.

If ever he needed "a friend" it was at that very moment, but who was helping him?

The handwriting was not Cantwell's.

Was it Pauline's chirography?

He did not know.

"I'll trust my friend," he said, half audibly. "I'll send word at once to the rebel chief."

Tearing the message into fragments and thrusting them through a crevice in the floor, Paul called one of the guards in the corridor outside, and told him that he had decided to translate the cipher.

At last, after what seemed hours of waiting, although in reality not more than fifteen minutes had passed, a commotion in the corridor told him that a number of soldiers had arrived.

When the door opened, the light or a lantern permeated the room, and Paul was told to step forth, which he promptly did.

The detective's messenger found himself in the midst of a guard of twelve men, under the command of a lieutenant whose face was sternness itself.

He said not a word to Paul, but instantly put himself at the head of the little detachment, and ordered it to march.

Paul was once more in the streets of Richmond, ready to play his part of the desperate game which had just commenced.

The tramp of the guard echoed on the night air as it marched toward Beauregard's headquarters, distant more than a dozen squares from the prison where Paul had been confined.

Block after block was passed till the loyalist became uneasy.

"In the name of Heaven! where is that alley?" he asked himself. "Can it be that my friend has failed to carry out his plans? If he has, I shall go back to prison without facing Beauregard."

This was Paul's resolve,

A short distance further on the leader of the guard was brought face to face with two men indulging in a violent quarrel on the sidewalk.

They would not move off at his command, and suddenly they came to blows and then grappled like mad wrestlers.

The guard was forced to halt, and the next moment the two contestants were writhing in and out among the confused soldiers, despite the lieutenant's efforts to quiet them.

It was Paul's moment.

The scene just described was taking place at the mouth of a small opening which might be called an alley, and it flashed through the young loyalist's brain that it must be the demonstration promised in the mysterious message.

"Now's your chance," ejaculated one of the combatants, reeling against Paul. "Make the break and run for it."

We need not say that Paul did not want to bear another word.

He broke through the ranks of his guard with the force of a stag breaking through the stockades of his pen, and sprang down the alley.

Triumph seemed to lend him wings.

"The Yankee has escaped!" rang out on the air behind him.

"He's got into the alley—"

"Fire! fire! let him have it, then!"

The lieutenant's command was obeyed before it was finished. Bang! bang! went the guns of the guard, as they touched the soldier's shoulders, and all at once with a cry Paul pitched forward and fell at the foot of the alley fence.

At the same time the two men who had given him a chance for his life, disappeared from among the Confederates.

The Confederates entered the alley with muskets reloaded.

Thirty yards from the mouth they found a man lying on his face.

"Hyer he is, dead as a mack'rel!"

The soldiers turned the body over and held a match close to Paul's face, which was flecked with freshly spilled blood.

As they raised him up he gasped and threw a wild look around.

"Death will finish him shortly," said the rebel-lieutenant, after a glance. "There's no use of taking him to Beauregard now. Take him in your house where you see a door open. If he lives awhile we'll take him to the hospital. That cipher dispatch, I'm thinking, will never be read."

The next morning at daylight a wagon drove from that house, and Paul Phillips, still alive, and delirious, was taken to the hospital, "that he might die there," some one said.

Did he accommodate the Confederates by dying there?

We have seen that up to the first of March, two weeks after his adventures, he had not reported to Colonel Baker, at Washington.

Whether living or dead his whereabouts were shrouded in mystery.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAR DETECTIVE KEEPS HIS WORD.

"Your days are numbered, Silas Cantwell."

These words spoken, as we know, on the streets of Washington on the night of the first of March, reached no ears but those of the man who uttered them.

The war detective had unexpectedly turned up at the national capital at a moment when Wilkes Booth had fully prepared to strike a blow that would startle the world.

But two days intervened between Cantwell's return and Lincoln's second inauguration.

Only forty-eight hours stood between the great president and the gates of eternity, for Booth had chosen the fourth of March for his terrible work.

If no one baffled him—if his scheme was not discovered—he and his associates would carry out the most diabolical plot on record.

Who could baffle him?

He knew that Paul Phillips and his cipher message had never reached Colonel Baker, and he thought that Silas Cantwell, once his friend, but now his enemy, was out of his road forever, for certain events which assured him this had lately occurred in Richmond.

He had gathered around him some of the characters who afterward shared the fate he met after striking the blow meditated so long.

Among them was one Payne, a murderer at heart, and a member of a family of Kentucky outlaws.

This man would stoop to any deed of darkness or violence; he had no conscience; he seemed destitute of a soul.

It was he who saw Silas Cantwell when he left Colonel Baker's headquarters the night of his return to Washington; he it was who followed him with the stealthy tread of the assassin, declaring that his days were numbered.

Payne knew that with the war detective at the capital, Booth's plot was on the eve of failure, and fall it should not if he could track Cantwell down that night.

The detective did not suspect that he was followed, for he proceeded quite leisurely along the avenue, and did not pause until he reached a small frame house a short distance from the capitol itself.

For the first time casting about him to see that he was not observed by any suspicious characters, he entered by means of a key which he took from beneath the step, and, to Payne's chagrin, locked the door behind him.

"I can watch," said the tracker, smothering his disappointment. "He hasn't entered that house to spend the night there. Knowing what he does about my master's plot, he has come to Washington to work, not to rest."

The watcher had taken up his station under a large shade-tree a few yards from the house from whence, well hidden by its trunk, he could watch the door for Cantwell's reappearance.

His eyes told that he was sure of his victim, and they did not abate their confidence as the minutes wore away.

Not until an hour had passed did Booth's thug show signs of restlessness.

What had become of Silas Cantwell?

"I'd give a hundred dollars to be in that house a minute," he said to himself. "He cannot have left it. I have not taken my eyes from the door for a moment. It is not possible—"

At that very moment the door opened, and a man who did not in the least part resemble the war detective came out, and halted on the step for a moment.

Payne leaned forward and eyed the man with breathless curiosity.

He looked fully two inches shorter than Cantwell; his face was covered with a thick iron-gray beard as the rays of the nearest lamp showed the tracker, and he looked almost twenty years older than the war detective.

"The alouth-hound in a new skin—that's all," ejaculated Payne, smiling triumphantly as he watched the man. "If I kill you, my good fellow, I put Silas Cantwell forever out of our way. You'd die for me for a moment, but I'm on the right track again. Hal of you go!"

The last exclamation was caused by the watched man leaving the step, and when he had proceeded a short distance, Payne sprang after him with the same noiseless, tigerish tread.

The hour was not late, and the avenue was thronged with people; but nobody seemed to notice the thug and his marked victim, neither did the former lose sight of his man.

"What! does he know where Wilkes is to be found?" suddenly cried Payne, as his victim immediately started across the thoroughfare. "I am sure that he hasn't been two hours in Washington, and yet he strikes out for the master's quarters."

Cantwell, for we may as well acknowledge that the tracked man is the war detective, had slightly increased his gait, and Payne, in turn, did the same.

All at once he stopped before a closed door, which appeared to bar one's way to the upper stories of the building he then faced, and a glance at the number, readable on the transom, seemed to satisfy him.

Payne, with excited countenance, was now not more than thirty feet away, breathing hard, and grinding his teeth like a maddened tiger.

"How does he know that Wilkes is up there?" he shot out from between his clinched teeth. "What infernal fate is conspiring against us by bringing that man to Washington, when we thought him dead? He told Wilkes in Richmond that he'd have to kill him if he wanted to succeed in his scheme against the president. I see that we'll have to do that, for while he lives, Lincoln lives!"

Payne had scarcely ceased, ere Cantwell laid his hand on the white knob at the side of the door, and pulled it toward him.

With the blade of a formidable dirk along his arm, he crept forward in the shadow of the houses, his eyes fastened on Cantwell, and his whole nature roused to the work he was about to do.

Ere he reached his victim, however, the door was opened in response to the detective's ring, and the next moment Cantwell had crossed the threshold.

"That boy Harold's a fool for admitting him!" growled Payne, baffled and chagrined, as he was forced to halt, with bloodless dirk, before the door. "Let them go up stairs first. They can't keep me out long."

He waited a moment, and then softly unlocked the door by means of a night-key, and glided into the dark place beyond.

Cantwell, and the person who had admitted him, had disappeared.

"I've tracked him down, and here I will wait for him," continued Payne, hugging the darkest corner in the meager corridor, which was the spot behind the door. "To-night, Silas Cantwell, your last hunt ends."

Meanwhile the detective and his guide, who looked like a fop-pish youth of nineteen, had reached the landing above, where a dimly burning gas-jet feebly revealed several doors

"This way, sir," said the youth, turning to the left. "You will find Booth with his company, but, as you know the colonel, of course you will be no intruder."

A minute later the speaker opened a door, and Cantwell stepped into a large, well lighted room, which contained two persons.

One of these was a large, fine-looking man, with a military bearing, and more than fifty years old; the other was tall, elegantly built, with the face of an Adonis, and many years his companion's junior.

"Pardon me, Mr. Booth," said Cantwell, "for intruding upon your privacy; but I come on an errand of business, whose importance cannot be delayed."

Did Booth start while he listened to the detective's words, each one of which seemed to have been carefully selected before hand?

"State your business," he said.

"This gentleman is my friend, Colonel Ruby—"

"Merely a transformation of gems," interrupted Cantwell, fixing his eyes on the man in the chair. "In Richmond he was an Opal; in Washington, however, he shines as a Ruby."

The next instant the chair was deserted; the portly man was on his feet, his eyes almost starting from his head.

"Great God! I know him now, Wilkes," he cried. "That man is Silas Cantwell, the Yankee spy."

Booth started forward, every vestige of color driven from his handsome face, and his eyes gleaming like mad stars.

"Not the Silas Cantwell I met in Richmond," he said. "It cannot be the same man, for—"

"He, you precious plotters buried alive, eh?" interrupted the detective. "I am the same man!" he went on. "What did I tell you when I saw you last, Wilkes Booth?—that you'd have to kill me to succeed. I am here to repeat my words. I am here to tell you that Abraham Lincoln will be inaugurated day after to-morrow, and that you may swing that day 'twixt earth and heaven for your plots. Beware! I never warn a man twice!"

Cantwell, with outstretched arm and still facing Booth, stepped toward the door.

After his last word, one might have heard a feather drop in that room.

It was a startling tableau.

Suddenly, Booth seemed to regain volition.

"Beware yourself, Silas Cantwell!" he cried. "I can lift my finger and blot you from existence, even here in Washington!"

The response was a defiant laugh.

"Do all you can, fool!" said Cantwell, a moment later. "You are fast digging the most infamous grave ever made on this continent. The fourth of March is almost here. It shall not see you triumph. Beware!"

Cantwell's heels were at the threshold as he uttered the last word, and ere Booth could reply he was going down the stair.

"I'll make his boast a lie!" vociferated, the plotter drawing a revolver and springing toward the door.

"My God! not here, Wilkes! It might betray my presence in Washington," and white-faced Colonel Opal clutched Booth's arm.

"I didn't invite you thither!" cried Booth.

"I know that, but—"

"Hark! what's that? Cantwell has met some one below."

Yes; the war detective had encountered somebody in the little space at the foot of the stair.

A figure, half human, half tiger, had leaped upon him with a blade that possessed a gleam even in the dim light that prevailed there.

It was Payne.

Although taken unawares, Silas Cantwell had met the attack as best he could.

"We'll triumph on the fourth of March, after all!" was hissed in his ears, while Booth, holding his breath, leaned over the banisters above, and watched the struggling figures below.

Down came a strength-mailed arm with the last word, but a snapping of steel followed, and something dropped to the floor.

The next instant a cry of triumph was heard, and the body of a man fell heavily upon the steps.

Then the door opened and shut, and Wilkes Booth bounded down the stair.

"Great Heaven, it is Payne!" he gasped, bending over the body in the corridor.

Yes; the man lying before him, gasping and still conscious, was his associate in the darkest crime in history.

Cantwell was gone.

"Why didn't you kill him?" asked Booth, eagerly.

"I tried to, but curse him! I couldn't drive my knife through a steel vest!" was the reply, and Payne's eyes wandered to the dagger-belt he still clutched in his right hand. "But never mind, Wilkes; we'll triumph on the fourth in spite of him."

"No, Payne. Silas Cantwell has laid his plans for our arrest. We must postpone the day. Lincoln shall live through the inaug-

uration ceremonies; but the detective's triumph shall be brief. We'll plan anew, and, when we get ready to strike again, there will be no Silas Cantwell to baffle us."

Payne ground his teeth till they cracked.

"You are the master, Wilkes," he said. "The next time there shall be no failure."

CHAPTER XI.

AT WORK AGAIN.

Thus the great inaugural day was tided over, thanks to Silas Cantwell, without a tragedy to clothe the whole land in mourning, and to shock the world.

The war detective, escaping from the toils in which the plotters had enveloped him in Richmond, had reached Washington in time to frustrate Booth's first attempt.

Would he be as successful in dealing with the second one?

We shall see.

One of the proudest men who witnessed the inauguration ceremonies was the detective himself.

He knew that Booth and his co-plotters would shrink from murder on that day, since the government detective force was on the alert, and ready to baffle any and all attempts at assassination.

He was not sure that Booth was not in Washington, for, although warned that his plans were known, the plotter would be hard to drive far from the capital, especially when he had at his command a score of hiding-places of which Cantwell knew nothing.

A week passed away, a week of secret meetings and new plots, new plans.

It was the night of the last day of the week following the inaugural, when a man dismounted from a horse in front of an old hotel in a well known village ten miles south-east of Washington.

He was met on the steps before the house by a youth of fifteen, who took his horse and led him away, while the man pushed his way into the house without announcing his presence by any raps.

"Ah! here you are—on time," exclaimed a woman's voice when the man had shut the door behind him. "You are never late."

"Punctuality is one of my favorite loves," was the reply, as the man doffed his hat and stepped into a plainly furnished room whose lamp instantly revealed him as Wilkes Booth.

The woman who followed him into the room was large, well formed, and, though a trifle past middle age, still quite handsome. Her hair was brushed back, displaying a good forehead, and the simple dress she wore lent a motherly charm to her appearance.

No one would have suspected at first glance that this woman had plotted with Booth against the life of a president, that the secret meetings of the conspirators had taken place under her roof from the inception of the plot, and that she had trained her children to hate with her the life of such a ruler as the martyr Lincoln.

That woman was Mrs. Surratt, the village Surrattsville, and the house John Lloyd's hotel, which, in reality, belonged to the woman.

Booth's countenance still showed the deep chagrin to which Cantwell's work had subjected him.

He sent several searching glances around the room as he entered, and seeing that he and Mrs. Surratt were its only occupants, he turned to her and said:

"Has the new map arrived?"

"It came to-day," was the answer, and turning away the woman left Booth alone.

For several minutes the doomed young actor stood where he had first halted, then he stepped hastily to one of the windows, as though a footfall had sounded on his guilty ears.

"A few more days and we will win," he murmured. "Of course we'll receive the eternal condemnation of the North, but what of that? We'll win everlasting fame by the deed, and the unspeakable gratitude of the South, whose wrongs by one blow will be avenged. Silas Cantwell is a fool if he thinks I have seceded from my schemes, an idiot if he supposes his theatrical warning has unnerved me. I am fixed in my purpose, though the outcome cost me every drop of my blood. The die is cast, and Wilkes Booth will never play the coward!"

He ended abruptly, for a footstep announced Mrs. Surratt's return, and he turned to behold her standing near a table with a small roll in her hands.

As he advanced toward the table, the woman opened the roll upon it, and displayed a carefully drawn map of the Maryland peninsula between Chesapeake bay and the Potomac river.

The various roads were pretty plainly worked, and the meanderings of the several sluggish streams that traverse the country were indicated by red lines.

Booth looked the map over in silence for several minutes before he ventured an opinion.

"It's better than the other one. With that we would lose out

way," he said, glancing at Mrs. Surratt. "Do you think we can rely entirely on this map?"

"I think we can. Mr. Lloyd pronounces it quite accurate, and I am willing to risk his judgment."

"Very well. I will accept it also; "but," and Booth smiled faintly, "it would not be pleasant for one to lose his way on the peninsula."

"It swarms with our friends, you know," replied the woman, quickly. "I have prepared a list of them for you. You will find every one faithful; no danger of betrayal by them, I assure you."

Booth looked satisfied, but turned to the map again.

"I wish the houses of those friends were located on the map," he said. "That would make things plainer, I think."

"I can have it done."

"Then, have it done. It would please me better. I do not want to make a single mistake in this matter. I have been baffled once, you know."

Booth's brow darkened as he finished.

"It was the first and last failure, Wilkes!" exclaimed Mrs. Surratt, her eyes exhibiting much animation. "The next time we will succeed. But what has become of your enemy?"

"Silas Cantwell? Ah! Payne is watching for him," said Booth. "I was informed to-day that he has been away from Washington. Payne says that he went south the day after the inauguration."

"To Richmond?"

"What would take him thither now?"

"I do not know. I merely asked."

"His late experience there would not draw him thither, I'm thinking. He has not followed Colonel Opal home, for that game is not worth Silas Cantwell's time. I wish I had never met that old Fuss-and-feathers. His zeal for the South is apt to overbalance his discretion. He doesn't mean wrong, but if he were with me a week, I believe we should be betrayed."

"I hope he will remain away," said Mrs. Surratt.

Mrs. Surratt rolled the map up again, and was about to carry it from the room, when a peculiar rap startled both parties.

They exchanged significant looks.

"Were you looking for any one to-night?" Booth asked.

"No."

"One of our number is at the door, for the signal has been given," was the reply. "I cannot think who it can be. I left Harold in Washington, and had a talk with Payne ten minutes before I crossed the bridge—"

"I'll solve the mystery," was the interruption, and Mrs. Surratt left the room, followed anxiously by Booth's eyes.

The arch conspirator leaned forward as the door opened, and started when he heard what he thought was a woman's voice.

A moment later, Mrs. Surratt appeared, bearing in her arms a piece of white paper, neatly folded, which she extended toward Booth as she reentered the room.

"Only a letter for you," she said.

"Who brought it?" asked Wilkes, as he took the proffered note.

"Indeed, I do not know." It was placed in my hands, and a voice said: 'Please give this to Mr. Booth,' and the person who spoke vanished.

A cloud crossed the actor's face.

"I don't like that," he said, frankly, and with evident displeasure. "Did you not notice that the bearer of this note gave our signal?"

"I did, Wilkes, but pardon me. I have so many things to think of now, I quite forgot my duty."

"We must be very careful," was the reply, and Booth's fingers began to unfold the note.

He was closely watched by Mrs. Surratt, whose eyes regarded his face more than the letter.

"Look here; another fool at work," suddenly exclaimed Booth, with anger-flashing eyes, and he flung the open paper upon the table. "Do they think to frighten me with such things as these? Don't they know I have gone too far to take a backward step?"

Mrs. Surratt advanced to where the paper lay, and picked it up. One look, and her face became slightly pale, but she kept her equanimity.

What did she see?

Traced on the paper, which was the half sheet of a billet paper, was a scaffold, from which suspended a sheriff's noose.

Under the well drawn instrument of judicial murder were written these words, in delicate, but distinct, chirography:

"Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Abraham Lincoln. 1865."

"Let me see that again!" suddenly cried Booth, taking the paper from Mrs. Surratt's hand. "That is a woman's writing. Can it be that she knows our secret?"

He studied the inscription for a moment, and then sprang toward the door with it in his hand.

"It can't be Stella," he exclaimed, "for it isn't her hand-writing. Who, then, sends this to me? The person who delivered it

at the door a minute ago, is both writer and artist. She can't be far away. By Jove! if she's as fair as Psyche, I will not hesitate to send her to Hades!"

Mrs. Surratt saw him bound across the threshold like a madman, leaving her breathless and alarmed in the room.

"Is he mad?" she exclaimed. "What if one of his old loves has discovered the secret, and threatens to betray us all? Great God! the deepest swamp in Maryland would prove no asylum!"

As for Booth, he had already reached the open air, and stood near a tree, listening, with his finger at the trigger of a revolver he had drawn.

All at once he heard the galloping of a horse.

Nearer and nearer it came, from the direction of Washington.

Most certainly the rider's destination was the house he had just vacated.

Without stirring in his tracks, the actor-assassin listened to the hoof beats, which scarcely drowned the throbs of his own heart.

Suddenly the horse and his rider loomed up before him, and a man landed on the ground at his feet.

"Here I am," said Booth, his hand falling heavily on the man's shoulder. "What brings you hither, boy?"

Before there was a reply of any kind, the person addressed started as if the hand of the dead had touched him.

"By George! you frightened me," he said. "I have news for you, Wilkes."

"Out with it. Are we betrayed again?"

"No, not quite that bad," said Harold, Booth's most pliant tool throughout the great conspiracy.

"Silas Cantwell has come back to Washington, and Paul is with him."

Booth received the tidings with a slight start, which the night kept from Harold's eyes.

"The boy, Paul, eh?" he said. "So the young fellow recovered his reason, and Cantwell went to Richmond after all. Payne, I'm afraid, will find his hands full now."

"But that is not all," said the messenger, waiting for Booth to pause. "A woman seems to be hunting you."

"A woman, eh? Describe her."

"She is tall and beautifully formed. Her face I did not see, for she kept it covered."

"Great God! It must be Pauline!" said Booth, half under his breath, and he crushed the mysterious note madly in his hand.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARK COMMISSION.

For a moment after Booth's last word, there was silence between the two men.

Suddenly, Booth said, looking into Harold's face:

"Go back to Washington at once. Find Payne, and tell him to keep track of Cantwell and Paul. I will look after the woman. Not a moment is to be lost. Go!"

The plotter's words, spoken in tones of significance, told Harold that no time was to be thrown away.

Was the great plot on the eve of failure again?

With a look at Booth, the messenger turned to mount the steed, whose bridle rein he had held all the time.

"No grass shall grow under my feet," he said. "I will find Payne, and I will help him battle Silas Cantwell."

"You? No. I have other work for you. Payne will be more than a match for those two men."

It was evident that Booth did not trust Harold implicitly, since he admitted Cantwell into the house on the avenue the night that witnessed the overthrow of the scheme to culminate in assassination on the fourth of March.

Mrs. Surratt had heard the horse that had carried Harold from Washington, but she had failed to catch the conversation which had passed between the two men.

Booth did not choose to relieve her anxiety when he rejoined her in the parlor; on the contrary, he mystified her still more.

"See that the map is ready for use within three days," he said. "There's no telling how soon it will come useful."

"Mrs. Surratt gave him a searching look.

Nothing about the nocturnal horseman and his message. If it concerned them and their plot against Lincoln, why should Booth conceal it from her?

A sudden resolution showed itself in Mrs. Surratt's mien.

"Was the news good or bad?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; I had quite forgotten," answered Booth, starting slightly. "It was not important enough to have necessitated a ride from the capital."

"Who came?"

"That nervous boy, of course."

"Dave Harold! I wish we had never taken him in," said the woman, bitterly. "He's a chicken-hearted coddling; he will prove it in the end."

"Then," said Booth, smiling, "the world will be better off when he's gone. I think I'll follow him back to the city," he added, quickly. "There is nothing here for me to do. If Silas Cantwell should return we may have to meet him at once. Yes, I'd better go back."

Mrs. Surratt did not try to detain her visitor, and he was permitted to depart without ceremony.

He went to the stable, found the horse he had ridden from Washington, and sprang into the saddle, like a man eager to reach a certain destination as quickly as possible.

But, strange to say, he did not give the horse the rein when he was securely mounted, but allowed him to move off at his own gait, which was not by any means a rapid one.

A guilty conscience is always one's most persistent accuser, and Booth's heart must have told him that he was at the head of the blackest conspiracy on record.

The blood of Lincoln was to avenge the South, and his rest after four years of strife was to be the dreamless slumber of the tomb!

Let us not attempt to analyze Booth's thoughts as he rode toward Washington, listening all the time for a footstep in his rear.

What they were is known only by He who reads the thoughts of all men, and by the assassin himself.

The ten miles between Surrattsville and the capital might have been traversed in less than one hour by the horse which carried Booth that night, but something seemed to hold the plotter back.

At last, without accident, he reached the river, and the hoofs of his horse sounded on the planks of the bridge.

Booth did not hesitate, but gave his proper name to the officer in charge, and passed on.

Then for the first time since leaving Surrattsville he seemed to regain his old-time spirits, for he urged the horse forward, and was borne rapidly across the bridge.

"Well, I'm back again. Now for work!" fell from his lips when he found himself among the suburbs of the capital proper once more. "Harold isn't much ahead of me, and I doubt if he has yet found Payne."

Turning to the left Booth soon found himself on Pennsylvania avenue, but he soon afterward gulded his steed into a narrow street, and thence down an alley which was quite dark.

He knew exactly where he was, for when he drew rein he leaned to one side and opened a stable-door, after which he dismounted, and led the animal inside.

Passing through the stable without unsaddling the horse in the darkness, the assassin entered a backyard, across which he advanced toward a house, whose outlines were plainly visible.

Not until he had climbed an outside stairway and entered the house on the second floor did Booth pause, and then he found himself in a small but well-furnished room, whose gloom he had relieved by lighting the gas.

A breath indicative of satisfaction escaped him as he began to divest himself of the outer coat he had worn during his journey.

As he unbuttoned it something fell to the floor.

Booth stooped quickly and picked it up.

"That accursed bit of paper," he said, fiercely, seeing the outlines of a scaffold on the paper. "I thought I had destroyed it. I wonder how it got under my coat? Well, I'll make short work of it now."

So saying, he strode across the room to the gas jet, in which he held the warning until it was entirely consumed.

"There!" he exclaimed, stepping back. "Burned papers, like dead men, tell no tales. Now, my dear Pauline, it is my request that you trouble me no more with such documents. There is but one woman beside my mother for whom I care a whit, and she is not near. Stella, ah! I wonder what has become of you? Well do I know that you love Wilkes Booth; that you would give your life to turn him from his purpose. But the sacrifice would avail you naught. While I am wedded to the task of avenging the South, I cannot think of you, Stella, more than for a moment."

He turned away and sprang to the door, but before he could touch the knob it opened, and he confronted a man.

"Hal Payne," ejaculated Booth; "how did you know that I was back?"

"I saw your horse in the stall."

"Did you get Harold's message?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I'll attend to it. They're both here," and Payne's eyes glared. "I now know what took Cantwell from Washington. He went to Richmond to find Paul, who has been delirious in the hospital ever since the Confederate guards shot him the night he attempted to escape. I think he'll soon wish he had not recovered his reason."

"Can you attend to both of them?" asked Booth, eagerly.

"I can. Look!" and Payne laid a new bowie knife on the table.

"You see I've exchanged my broken blade for a whole one. The next time I will hit Silas Cantwell where steel does not protect him. With that knife I could fight my way through the czar's guards to the throne itself."

"That terrible knife was enough to make one shudder; but Booth manifested no emotion while he gazed upon it."

It was a dirk which had become historical, for with it Lewis Payne afterward cut his way to Secretary Seward's bedside. Not until the big shouldered thug had put up his knife did the men speak again.

"You may hear good news within the next forty-eight hours," said Payne, looking at Booth.

"Will you be the bearer of it?"

"I expect to be," was the reply. "I wish one thing, Wilkes, that Colonel Opal would go home."

Booth started, and let an exclamation of anger fall from his tongue.

"Is he here yet?"

"Yes, I had difficulty in avoiding him to-night. He's been hanging around the old quarters. If the authorities would arrest him he'd give the whole thing away, for Colonel Baker could frighten him out of his wits."

"Where is he now?"

Booth buttoned his coat after the question.

"I'll read him a lecture he'll never forget," he continued, madly. "I wish I had never met the old fool."

"Leave him to me also," said Payne, with a significant look.

"Don't kill him, Payne."

"Oh, I'll not shed a drop of his blood," laughed Booth's associate, his dark eyes twinkling. "I think I know how to deal with the over zealous old codger. He'll be on the jump toward Richmond before daylight if I can find him, and I think I can."

Payne moved toward the door as he concluded, said "good-night" to Booth, and was gone.

He was followed by a person whose feet gave forth no sound as they glided over the ground, and that person was a woman!

If Booth had known that his right hand man was so closely watched, would he have remained quiet in that upper room?

If he could have seen that woman's face he would have clinched his hands and leaped upon her like a tiger.

He would have said:

"Pauline, you have followed me to Washington to die! Nobody shall baffle me any more."

But he did not see her, and Payne kept on with the tireless, watchful woman at his heels.

She did not seem to fear him, and yet she must have known that she was on a human tiger's trail.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VIRGINIA GOOD-BY.

"This isn't Richmond, boy. This is the old capital over which waves the stars and stripes. You're back in the old quarters we left almost a year ago. Now, when you have rested, we will get to work again."

"I feel rested now, Leon. I am ready to help baffle Wilkes Booth, or any person who plots against our president. Do you think he still harbors his wild schemes?"

"He? There's no telling what is in Wilkes Booth's head to-night. He's possessed himself of the insane idea that the South must be avenged, and that he is the man to deal the avenging blow. He is not alone in the plot. The man who attempted my life at the foot of the star leading to Booth's lodgings is a fair sample of the desperate characters he has made his tools. That man is an assassin by nature. Any person who would throttle a woman and row her into the middle of the river, and cast her into the current, would not hesitate to kill a man. Do you think he would, Paul?"

"Of course he would not, but who did this miscreant serve in the manner you have described?"

"You may learn by and by," was the unsatisfactory answer, as the speaker, Cantwell, the war detective, looked from the window at which he sat. "I can assure you, Paul, that it was not Pauline; but I was going on busy about this Payne, or Powell, as he is sometimes called, that he will be on the alert for our return to Washington. He may know already that we have arrived."

"Then, you believe that Booth and his friends are still here?"

"I know it. I had scarcely crossed the bridge to-night ere I saw the young fool Booth is dragging with him to the scaffold—Dave Harold. Of course they're all here. You no sooner break one egg of treason than another one is laid."

"Do you think they will carry on the same old plot?" asked Paul.

"Yes, with some slight modifications. Booth, I am sure, will attempt to take the president's life in person. He will not let any of his associates do that. Work has been laid out for Payne, but

just what it is, no one beyond the conspirators' circle knows. We will find out, though; you can depend on this, Paul."

"I wish we could begin to-night."

Cantwell did not reply.

He had returned to Washington, but not alone.

Having baffled Booth, and prevented him from attempting Lincoln's life on the day of his inaugural, he had made his way to Richmond in search of Paul, who had never reached Colonel Baker with the important message intrusted to his care.

Cantwell was much attached to the young man, who had served him so faithfully, and he was, moreover, desirous of having him share in the anticipated triumph over Booth and his fellow plotters.

We need not record the war detective's adventures in the Confederate capital, but will say that he found Paul still in the hospital, and almost recovered from the wound received from the guard, by whom he was being conducted to Beauregard's headquarters when he attempted to escape.

The wounds received on that occasion had deprived him of reason for a time, but when Cantwell reached Richmond he was himself again, and the train managed to reach Washington without being arrested.

Thus it was that we find them together in the detective's old quarters on the night that witnessed the events of the foregoing chapter.

"What has become of Pauline—do you know?" suddenly asked Paul.

"No, I do not, but she will find us, or we will discover her some time," was the answer.

The next moment Cantwell started and placed his face nearer the window pane.

"Wait for me here. On no account stir from this room till I return."

Before the young man could question him, he was gone.

When Cantwell reached the sidewalk, he looked out upon the broad avenue for a moment, and then hastened toward the White House.

"I could not have been mistaken," he said, to himself. "I saw them but for a moment, and my eyes seldom deceive me. What! has Pauline turned tracker in the same drama I am interested in? I used to tell her in Richmond that she would make a good spy; now I know it."

As the detective kept on, his keen eyes saw everybody whom he met and passed.

On, on he went, nor paused until the street lamps enabled him to see the trees that grew in front of the presidential mansion.

"Halt! Cantwell," he said, to himself, in low tones, stopping at that moment under one of the trees. "If I am not mistaken, I've caught sight of a gentleman with whom I am slightly acquainted."

The detective's last words were spoken in a sarcastic manner, while his eyes remained fixed on two men who were slowly approaching him from toward the White House itself.

One of the men was six feet tall, and quite portly. The other was not so large, although he possessed shoulders of ample breadth, and looked as strong as a lion.

"Yes, sir, you've got to get out of Washington before sunrise," the man last described said to the other. "The whole plot is in the hands of the police."

"Great God! no!"

"It's a disastrous fact," was the cold rejoinder. "Colonel Baker has been furnished with a list of names from which to make arrests. Somebody's going to swing, I'm afraid, colonel. We've blundered somewhere along the line."

"Blundered? Who's blundered?" stammered the giant, who was, as the reader has guessed ere this, our old acquaintance, Colonel Lovelace Opal. "You don't mean to accuse me of giving the thing away?"

"Heaven knows who's peached," was the reply. "We've got to fly or swing. You can take your choice, colonel. I've taken mine."

"Where are you going?"

"Me? I wouldn't tell my mother. You must go, too."

"I will."

"You must go to-night."

"I shall. By George! I didn't come to Washington to be hung."

"You were in a good way for it, prowling around the White House. Why, this would be evidence enough to draw you up."

"Great heavens! I should say it would. I never thought of that. I happened to be strolling along the avenue, and curiosity directed my steps into the park. What's become of Wilkes?"

Cantwell held his breath as he leaned forward to catch the reply. "You don't think he's in Washington, I hope? He'd be a fool to remain here now," were the words that rewarded him.

Colonel Opal was silent for a moment.

"Do you think I can cross the bridge?" he asked, suddenly.

"It is safe yet. To-morrow 'twill be death to attempt the passage."

"My God! you chill the marrow of my bones!" cried the colonel. "When I get back to Richmond, I'll stay at home. I was a fool for coming here in the first place."

"I think so, too."

"What's that, sir?" flashed the colonel, angrily.

Payne stopped the Southerner, and faced him with the mein of bullying rough.

"I mean what I've said. You've got to go South right away. I want no traitors here. Swear to me on this spot that you will cross the Potomac to-night, not to return without our permission, or I'll apply a remedy that will forever silence your raving tongue."

Cantwell saw, and the colonel did, too, the long dirk that left its hiding place as the last words fell from Payne's lips.

The detective prepared to spring forward.

"Go to Richmond, or receive the length of this!" hissed Payne, in tones well calculated to cow even a courageous man. "I am a man of action, as well as words, colonel. I've carried my life in my hands for many years, but you shall not consign all of us to the gallows. To Richmond!"

Colonel Opal recoiled a step as the blade gleamed in his face.

"I go to Richmond, but first take this, scoundrel!" he said, and the next second, before Payne could prepare for what was coming, his right hand shot forward with the force of a stone hurled from a catapult.

"Now I can go to Richmond with a clear conscience," said the Southerner, gazing for a moment upon the form of his victim. "I never exposed their plot. He trumped up a lie in order to get to kill me. By Heaven! I hope the Yankee government will choke him first when it begins to hang. Now for Richmond, colonel. It will be a rainy day when you set foot in Washington again."

"That's a sound resolve," said a voice that made the colonel start back.

"My God! who are you?" he gasped.

Cantwell stood before him.

"I'm a gentleman who wishes you to keep that resolution," replied the detective. "I thank you for the blow you dealt to-night. One of its magnitude was never more deserved. There'll be a big hanging spree here before long unless some human devils are thwarted. Rebel though you are, colonel, I don't want to see you stretched hemp, for I've had some pleasant times with you."

"Silas Cantwell!" ejaculated the colonel.

"Yes, Silas Cantwell, the Yankee agent, whom you met in Richmond," smiled Cantwell. "Go home at once. When that villain on the grass recovers he'll want more blood than even you can furnish."

"I'm off, Cantwell—off for Richmond."

Colonel Opal turned away as he finished, and the war detective did not detain him.

A moment later Cantwell was left alone.

After a hasty but searching glance around, he approached Payne, who had fallen in a deep shadow, and lay with his already swollen face upturned to the leaves.

Stooping over him the detective searched his pockets carefully, but discovered no papers of any kind.

"A murderer by profession, he carries no damaging papers on his person," said Cantwell, relinquishing the search. "He won't know himself when he consults a mirror. Thanks to Colonel Opal's muscle," and smiling to himself, the detective turned from the spot and walked toward the avenue.

He would have smiled just the same if the big Virginian's blow had killed the desperado of the capital.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUARREL.

"Thanks to Colonel Opal's muscle," as Cantwell has remarked, Lewis Payne's face presented anything but a handsome appearance when he entered Booth's presence the next day and dropped into a chair with a mad groan.

At first the chief plotter against the president did not recognize his associate, but the curses which Payne begun to heap upon the Virginian's head served to make him known.

Booth ventured the remark that Payne had had a encounter with some one who possessed a good deal of power.

"Power? My soul! I should remark!" grated the desperado. "I've been hit by that Virginia fool whom I thought too cowardly to lift his hand against a boy. He's got a fist like a trip-hammer, and he knows how to wield it, too. This is what I get for ordering him back to Richmond. I asked him to choose between the Confederate capital and my new knife, and he chose the former; but not until he had knocked me through the whole planetary system."

Booth smiled slightly, and allowed Payne to run on.

"Won't I pay him back for that blow, though!" cried the villain, grating his teeth; "won't I make him wish that he had never lifted his hand against me! I have not done with Colonel Opal. He will not have to come back to Washington to see me. I'd go a thousand miles to settle with the smasher."

"When will you do it, Payne?" asked Booth.

"When we have finished our work," was the reply. "Don't think that I'm going to throw up our scheme just to get to punish that cowardly F. F. V. Not a bit of it. Our work first, Wilkes; then my private revenge."

"That's right; but what have you found out about Cantwell and Paul?"

"Nothing as yet. I suffered with this face of mine all last night; suffered a thousand deaths. I've been hit before, Wilkes, but never by a sledge hammer at the end of a mau's arm. I am not forgotten the detective; don't think so for a moment. I am beginning to look presentable again, am I not?"

One eye was still nearly shut, and his right cheek was swollen and wore a dark bluish hue.

"By Jove! I could confront Cantwell by daylight and he wouldn't know me, eh, Wilkes?" he suddenly exclaimed.

"I wouldn't advise you to risk it. Silas Cantwell, as they call him, has keen eyes."

"We'll know that; but he won't be looking for Lewis Payne with his face bunged up in this manner. I wouldn't be afraid to risk it. Where's David?"

"I sent him across the river on an errand this morning."

"To Lloyd's?"

"Yes; why do you ask?"

Payne did not reply for a moment.

He took a hasty turn across the room, and looked out of the window upon the avenue below.

"I wouldn't care if he never came back," he suddenly growled.

"You don't like the boy?" said Booth. "Do you suspect him?"

"No, I don't; but he's chicken-hearted," was the plain response.

"I don't say that Dave Harold will betray us, but he's not got the grit to face real danger when it comes. He thinks there's nobody in the world like you, Wilkes; he's learned all your favorite theatrical pieces just to please you, as he thinks; but he's a boy whose beard hasn't grown yet for all that. Do you think that Dave Harold's the right man to be with us in this scheme?"

Booth's eyes flashed indignantly at the plain question.

A man whom he had made his confederate had dared to criticize his choice of associates.

Booth's haughty spirits were stirred to their depths.

"I am responsible for Harold's connection with the scheme," he said, looking Payne squarely in the face and speaking in the tone of a master. "When I selected him, I asked the advice of no one. You may not like him. I cannot help that. Your prejudice may arise from the fact that I did not consult you when he was chosen."

"Have I said so?" demanded Payne, madly returning Booth's look with interest.

"No; but your words and your manner led me to think so. I have the good of the South ever uppermost in my mind. I first conceived the scheme which I am going to carry out if it costs me all my blood. I have called Harold to my side because I can mould him to any purpose. The fellow is pliable and obedient. I cannot help it that you do not fancy him."

"I might take a notion to withdraw from the plot," threatened Payne.

Booth started visibly.

What! his right hand man leave him at that important juncture?

Deserted by Payne, what would not Cantwell be able to do in ferreting out the gigantic conspiracy against the Union?

Booth looked deep into Payne's eyes.

He could not believe that the man really intended to desert him, but he resolved not to yield to him.

So he beat down his fears, and said:

"You are at liberty to withdraw. I shall attempt to hold no one. I shall reach the goal, if I have to reach it alone."

The reply told Payne that Booth's resolution was of the kind that cannot be changed.

With a glowering look he moved to the door.

"I will not ask you to favor me again," he said, laying his hand on the knob. "You may have to reach the goal without Lewis Payne. I want no boys in a plot with me. This is no foolish scheme. It is the darkest, riskiest plot men ever dabbled in. It is against the ruler of twenty millions of people every one of whom loves him. Think of it, Wilkes. You keep in your employ a beardless boy while you plot against President Lincoln."

Booth was silent.

"I don't ask you to change your mind. Once since you left Richmond I saved your life. The whole scheme was on the eve of betrayal. A certain person went to the White House one night

and begged to be admitted to Lincoln's presence; for what? To give the whole plot away. I happened to be where I could aid you, Wilkes. That person was to have returned the next day, but there was no return. Why not? Because that night a boat was rowed out into the Potomac, and a human body dropped from it into the current which tells no tales of betrayal.

"Of course I thank you, Payne," said Booth. "Now let me hear the name of the would-be betrayer."

Lewis Payne did not speak.

He seemed to move nearer the door.

"Who was he?" persisted the actor.

"No! You will not let Harold go, and I can keep my secret," was the answer, as the door opened.

"Good afternoon, Wilkes. I wish you success, but you will please excuse Lewis Payne from all future service in the scheme."

As the last word died away, the door shut in Booth's face, and the footsteps that went down the stairs told him that Payne, his right hand man, was gone.

"Let him go!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I am not going to knuckle to a man like Lewis Payne. I am ready to move to my goal alone, with the avenging pistol in my hand. He is only doing what Mr. Serratt said he might do in a passion. She has warned me of this outbreak of mutiny. Colonel Opal's blow has maddened him, and he had to take his spite out on some one. He has chosen Harold as his victim, but I will not dismiss the young man, not even if I lose Payne by clinging to him. He will cool down before night. He will whimper at my feet again, and beg me to forget this scene. But if he does not, I will carry out my schemes without him. I have sworn to kill the man in the White House, and a hundred desertions shall not balk me!"

Booth stepped to the window as he let the last word fall from his lips, and gazed down upon the street below.

All at once his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire, and stepping back he snatched a revolver from the table.

Then he leaped to the window again and threw up the shut.

At that moment an open carriage, guarded by a little troop of cavalry appeared opposite the window.

The occupants of the vehicle were Mr. Lincoln and his son, Tad, on their way to the capitol.

What an opportunity for Booth to do his terrible work!

But he lowered the revolver which he had suddenly raised against the president, and watched the carriage roll on.

"Not now," he said. "A few more days, Mr. Lincoln, and the imperious North will kneel at your bloody bier."

That was prophecy.

CHAPTER XV.

A TOUCHING APPEAL.

Did Payne come back to the ambitious man he had sworn to aid to the blackest plot that stains the page of history?

Before we answer this question, let us look upon a scene which should have turned the murderer's feet from his victim, and moved a heart of stone.

More than one Journey Booth made alone to Surrattsville during the days that followed his exciting scene with Payne.

He met more than one person under the roof of Lloyd's hotel.

There came to him persons whose names were heralded to the world in the last smoke of the rebellion.

There were secret conferences at night under that roof, maps were examined, roads traced with the fingers, and questions asked and answered.

What did it all mean?

Simply that Wilkes Booth was at work.

Not for a single moment had he abandoned the wild scheme born into his imaginative brain.

Payne, the desperado, had deserted him, but what of that?

There were others who hated Abraham Lincoln and his cause enough to help him in an assassination plot.

He still had Harold, Mrs. Surratt, and kindred spirits at his beck and call.

These were not all.

Other persons had been found and drilled in the work he had sworn to accomplish.

He had found in Atzerott, John Surratt, O Laughlin and Spangler men to his purpose quite.

Payne only was lacking to complete the infamous cabal.

Since that villain's withdrawal, the great war drama had been played almost to its close.

Grant, the first captain of the age, had forced the army of northern Virginia to its last resources, and the whole North had been electrified by news of Lee's surrender.

As the first gun of the rebellion had been fired in April, that month was also to witness the end.

As the first blood shed had crimsoned the grass of early spring,

the last and best blood of all was to redden the first sweet flowers of the year.

What a day it was for the whole land!

The greatest civil war of modern times was over.

Already the men who had faced one another for four years were turning their faces homeward, coming back to their old avocations, beating their weapons of warfare into the implements of peace.

It was the day for which the millions had yearned, for which the eyes of nation had looked through the smoke of battle.

It was the night of the twelfth of April in Washington.

Seated in a room, whose windows overlooked the brilliant avenue, was a man whose handsome features were pale and somewhat careworn.

He was the only occupant of the place, as the gas-jet shined, and he had drawn the curtains as if he did not wish to be noticed from the street.

He was in the act of writing, when a footfall, just beyond the door that faced him, fell upon his ears and attracted him.

"Stella!"

A beautiful girl crossed the threshold, with her large, sad eyes riveted on his face.

"Wilkes!" she said, "you were not looking for me, I know; but I could not remain away any longer."

The man—Wilkes Booth—did not speak for a minute, during which time he closed the door, and stepped toward his visitor.

"No, I was not looking for you, Stella," he said. "I did not dream that you were in Washington. When did you arrive?"

The girl smiled faintly.

"I have been here a long time," she said; "almost ever since you left Richmond."

Resentment lighted up Booth's eyes.

"You have not been watching me, have you?" he asked. "Stella, this is not womanly."

"I know it, but I have not watched you in the sense of being a spy. Wilkes, you know what I have told you more than once. The strength of giants could not have kept me away to-night. My God! I dream of the awful vortex into which you are about to plunge. You have not abandoned that terrible scheme; you still move on toward utter ruin, and the everlasting condemnation of the North."

Booth started, and recalled the circumstances under which he had read the last words to the beautiful being before him.

"I court that condemnation," he suddenly cried. "It will not kill a man like me."

"But it will blight our future lives. Oh! Wilkes, you must turn back. The war is over now; the South submits, and the Confederate soldiers even rejoice that the doors of the modern temple of James are closed. Peace will soon reunite the sections, and everybody will be happy again."

Booth looked away as if a mental struggle was taking place in his mind.

"Wilkes, let the future be for us," continued Stella, believing that she had moved the plottor. "The death of the president you hate will do no good. I plead for his life because I love you, because I have given you all the love that ever animated my bosom. Let your wild oath be blown into oblivion by the winds. Fame and fortune in other fields are yours. I will rejoice to see the man I love the greatest actor on the American stage. Listen to me, Wilkes. Dismiss the men you have gathered about you. Tell them that peace has disarmed you; tell them that the president shall live. Wilkes, Wilkes, will you not do this?"

The fair white hand of the girl was on Booth's arm, and her eyes were fixed on his darkening countenance.

"By Heaven! girl, you ask too much, and you appeal to me too late!" he said. "I must go on. The die is cast. —"

A sound like a wail of despair from Stella interrupted him.

"There are other things than mine that appeal to you—think of them," she cried. "Your mother stands between you and Abraham Lincoln, your sister's love appeals—"

"There!" and Booth pushed the girl away. "Don't mention my mother here. I am not going to be turned from my purpose by such means as these. The South must be avenged! The blood of the Northern president shall stain the laurel wreath he wears to-night. Oaths have been taken which cannot be broken, and pledges made which hell cannot rive assunder. Girl, you appeal to a heart of stone. You come to me on the very eve of the great work, and ask me to play the coward."

Stella tottered forward without a vestige of color in her face.

"Is it then too late? Will not a mother turn you back? Will not my love move you from the threshold of infamy and death?"

"I shall strike the blow that will compensate the South for her long struggle."

"Wilkes, Wilkes—"

"No more appeals, Stella," he interrupted, coldly.

"You must hear me. Oh, God! I cannot leave you thus. The river has given me up for this interview. A hand has held me

back until to-night. There is a man on your track who will not let you succeed. You know who I mean. Oh, desert the plot before his hand falls. For the sake of the woman who has surrendered her heart, her all to your keeping, for the love that has blossomed only for you, Wilkes—"

The appeal was not finished, for at that moment the door opened and a man appeared on the threshold.

Booth saw him first, and his eyes lighted up with a strange pleasure while he gazed.

Stella turned slowly upon the visitor.

"Merciful God!" arose from her lips, as she tottered back. "Oh, fiend—fiend! what brings you here?"

The next moment, ere the sentence was entirely finished, the beautiful girl fell senseless at Booth's feet.

The man in the doorway seemed transformed into a statue whose eyes were starting from its head.

"Come in," said Booth to him. "This girl must have met you before, Payne."

Payne?

Yes; the thug had come back.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TERRIBLE MANTRAP.

Lewis Payne slowly crossed the step with his eyes fixed on the unconscious girl lying at Booth's feet.

Was this the same person he had tracked from the White House a few nights before to throttle and throw him into the Potomac?

He could scarcely credit the evidence of sight, and yet the face was the same.

Yes; it was Stella, his late victim, the fair girl he had sunk with his own blood-stained hands beneath the startle waves of the river.

No wonder that Payne stared at her as if he saw a person who had risen from the dead; no wonder that his eyes almost started from their sockets, and that, despite his hardened character, an icy chill crept to his heart.

Booth could not but notice the man's sudden change of demeanor.

He already secretly rejoiced that Payne had come back of his own accord.

An hundred times had he longed for his right hand man since the quarrel, but he (Booth) was too proud to ask him to return.

Payne did not pause until he stood over Stella.

Then he slowly lifted his eyes to Booth, who saw that the murderer's face was white.

"When did she come?" he asked, with scarcely a perceptible movement of his lips.

"A while ago; but why did she faint on seeing you?"

"Hang me if I know," was the quick answer. "I know I'm not good looking, but I did not think I was hideous enough to frighten women into a faint." The speaker smiled grimly, and let his eyes wander to the girl again. "If she can be moved, I'd like to see you for a moment, Wilkes."

Payne appeared to have something of importance to communicate, and Booth at once stooped and lifted Stella tenderly in his arms.

Watched by Payne, the chief plotter carried the unconscious girl across the room and into the hallway beyond.

"I have sent her home," he said.

"Home?" echoed Payne, starting forward. "Where does she live?"

"She would not tell me; she wants to be mysterious. I called a cab and told the driver to convey her to any place she desired to go."

Payne showed his disappointment by his looks.

He wanted to know where Stella lived.

What for?

To succeed the second time where he had failed the first, no doubt.

He soon saw that Booth was as ignorant of the girl's quarters as he was himself, and so he was forced to give up the inquiry.

"You see, I have come back," resumed Payne. "I think I was foolish for quitting you as I did, but I'd rather not discuss that matter, Wilkes."

"Very well," said Booth, satisfied to stop where Payne had ended. "I am glad to see you. You have news?"

"Yes. I have to tell you that an opportunity is about to present itself."

Booth did not reply, but his look requested Payne to proceed.

"Lincoln is to occupy the president's box at Ford's Friday night. Grant is expected to accompany him.

"Is that your news?" quietly asked Booth.

"Yes."

"It isn't news to me. Here;" and he drew a piece of paper

from an inner pocket; "here is a diagram of the president's box, and all approaches to it."

Payne listened, and looked on somewhat amazed.

"You see, I haven't been idle," continued Booth. "I am pleased to inform you that everything is in readiness for Friday night. What have you been doing—watching for Colonel Opal's return?"

"No. That scoundrel is in Richmond, where I can find him at any time. I've been watching Cantwell and Paul."

"Are they at work?" asked Booth, displaying a little nervousness.

"I should say they were. You do not think that Cantwell would remain inactive, suspecting what he does?"

"I do not."

"Well, he is at work! Paul, however, is not able to do much. He keeps his quarters pretty constantly for his last Richmond adventure still tells on his frame. I do not fear him. Cantwell is the man who needs looking after. Paul and his nurse are not dangerous."

"Who is his nurse?"

"Can you not guess?" said Payne, smiling faintly.

"It cannot be Pauline?"

"It is Pauline."

Booth started.

"I would call her dangerous in one sense of the word," he said, thinking of the paper which had been placed in his hands at Mrs. Surratt's house. "Yes, sir, I call that woman a dangerous person just at this juncture. We must not be balked this time. Lincoln dies Friday night."

"And the others, too. I have the diagram of the secretary's house perfect. You and I will be at work at the same hour. After to-night you will not fear Silas Cantwell."

"Why not?"

"Because the trap has been set, and will be sprung before dawn. I haven't been watching the war detective for nothing."

The door opened and shut, and Wilkes Booth was alone once more, alone with only forty-eight hours between him and eternal infamy.

Payne went down the steps like a man hurrying to keep an appointment.

Twenty minutes later he entered a house which had two front doors.

It was a large frame building, somewhat antique in its structure, with steep roof, no cornice, and with weather beaten shutters.

The two doors stood so close together that a hand could scarcely be laid between them.

Payne entered the right hand door, over which was barely distinguishable the number, 936.

He found himself at the foot of a stair, which he ascended half way, and then crouched like a waiting assassin on the steps.

The minutes passed rapidly away, but Lewis Payne did not move.

Who was he waiting for?—certainly for some one.

At last there came to his ears a sound that made him start.

He heard three peculiar raps, but not on the door he had lately entered.

They were bestowed on its neighbor, or on door number 938.

Ere the last rap died away, the door was opened, apparently by somebody from the inside, and Payne's hand shot above his head and grasped a rope a little stouter than a bell cord.

"Walk right up stairs," came a woman's voice through the partition at which Payne was listening with breathless intensity.

The person addressed began to ascend.

Payne counted the steps under his breath.

One, two, three, four, five, six—seven!

Then he jerked the cord with all his might!

A crash, and a half stifled cry followed the action, and Lewis Payne stood on his feet, his whole countenance beaming with a devil's triumph, his eyes on fire.

He did not stir until the silence of the grave seemed to fill the house again.

Then he crept down the dark stair and passed into a room to the right of the meager landing.

There, all at once, amid the gloom that surrounded him, a human hand fell across his wrist.

Payne recoiled, and let slip a startled ejaculation.

"It is I, Lewis," said a woman's voice. "The trap worked like a charm. Come and see."

The twain traversed the room, passed into another, where the woman picked up a dark-lantern, and they both descended into a large cellar.

"Here we are!" said Payne's conductor, who was by no means handsome, although she possessed brilliant eyes.

The two stood on the brink of what appeared to be an old well, which was immediately under a broken stairway.

Payne took the lantern from the woman's hand and thrust it into the abyss.

For several minutes he held it in a manner that threw the light downward, and used his eyes at the same time.

"I can't see him, but he's there all the same, Ione," he said, rising at last. "It's good by forever, Silas Cantwell. The slyest fox will get into the trap at last. We will not be molested Friday night. Now for the covering, Ione."

Setting the lantern down, Payne began to carry heavy pieces of wood from one corner of the cellar.

These he threw down the well one by one until not a piece was left.

"Buried forever!" he laughed. "The river may give up its dead, but my man-trap, never! This, Silas Cantwell, is the triumph of Lewis Payne!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EVE OF DOOM.

Everything seemed in readiness now for the consummation of the great plot.

Silas Cantwell, Booth's once friend, but persistent watcher, had been put out of the way, and Lewis Payne, who had sharpened his dirk for Secretary Seward's heart, could assure the chief plotter that he need fear the war detective no longer.

The war detective, with Paul, had determined to follow the trail to the end, without the assistance of any one.

He felt himself able to cope with Booth and his associates, but late events have demonstrated that he had failed to do so.

On the night of the thirteenth of April, or the night following the thrilling event detailed in the foregoing chapter, the last meeting of the presidenticides took place at Mrs. Surratt's house in Washington.

They were all there, and for the last time the dreadful crime was calmly discussed, and the final orders given by Booth.

On the table lay a map, dotted here and there with little red dots, under each of which was a name.

These were the houses of "friends" on the Maryland peninsula, and John Surratt had marked them all.

Even the roads which Booth was to take after the assassination had been traced in red—a color terribly appropriate for the crimson trail he afterward made from the nation's capital.

The conference broke up late, and the conspirators stole from the house, and departed their several ways.

Booth's step that night was light, even elastic.

He did not fear Silas Cantwell any longer, and he had even forgotten Pauline, who, Payne said, would be kept within doors by Paul's illness.

He had tried to win her love, but she had repulsed him.

Unlike Stella, she had refused to fall in love with his handsome face and winning voice, although she had treated him in a friendly, respectful manner, until she began to discover that he had evil designs against a great man's life.

"Hello!" exclaimed Booth, halting in front of one of the prominent hotels on the avenue on his way home from the last conference. "There is Brady, by my life!" and in he went, to slip a tall man on the shoulder, with a "Hello, old fellow!" which was immediately returned with a friendly greeting.

Brady was a colonel in the Potomac army, and had but lately arrived from the front.

"We'll all be there presently, Wilkes—two hundred thousand of us," said the Union colonel. "Your friends, my dear fellow, have reached their last ditch."

Booth's friendliness toward the South was so well known that his intimate friends never hesitated to jest him about it.

On this occasion, however, the actor-assassin started, and while his brow suddenly darkened for a moment, his eyes seemed to snap triumphantly.

"All of them have not found it yet, colonel," he said. "It may lie on this side of the Potomac for the other party."

These words were spoken with a significance that brought them forcibly to Brady's mind a few hours later.

"I'm sorry for you, Wilkes, indeed I am; but when the rash states have been reconstructed, you can star through them and draw immense houses."

"I'll draw big before the week's out."

"Do you play in Washington?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-morrow night! But come, colonel, let us drink a bumper to the events of the last few days. I'll be generous with you. I'll drink to your successful return from the pomp and circumstance of war," and taking the officer's arm, Booth led him to the elegant bar-room of the hotel.

What terrible words he had lightly spoken.

Yes, he was going to play on the following night—a drama whose equal the world had never seen.

From the hotel, where all who saw him remarked his gaiety on the ruins of the lost cause, he went to his lodgings and penned a few letters.

The clocks that struck midnight sent their sounds to his ears, for his pen was still moving over the paper.

Morning came.

At twelve o'clock Booth entered Pumphrey's stable in the rear of the National hotel, and engaged a fleet bay mare, saying that he would call for her toward evening.

"I've got the best horse in Washington," he said to a young man who awaited him in his room on his way back from the stable. "Your horse is also a good one. There's got to be some good riding done between this and daylight to-morrow, for David, my boy, we'll have the whole North at our heels."

At four o'clock that same day Booth reappeared at Pumphrey's stable, and took the mare he had engaged at twelve.

Mounting the animal, he cantered up F street, thence into an alley between Ninth and Tenth streets, and finally pulled up at a small stable off an alley near the one leading to the rear of Ford's theater.

"This is the saddle nag I have recently purchased," he said to a man whom he found at the stable. "Isn't she a beauty?"

"A splendid animal, Mr. Booth," was the reply. "Of course you want her unsaddled—"

"No; stand her in the stall just as she is," was the interruption. "She will be wanted to-night."

From the stable he made his way to a neighboring drinking resort, where he met, as if by accident, a man who gave him a meaningful look.

The twin ordered drinks and passed into a small apartment where they sat down at a table.

"Any news since last night?" asked Booth.

"Yes."

The chief plotter was instantly on the alert.

"Out with it; there are no listeners here."

The man, who had dark eyes, a somewhat swarthy face, and broad shoulders, leaned over the table.

"I've discovered where Stella lives," he said.

Booth looked disappointed.

"Is that all?"

The listener, Lewis Payne, bit his lip.

"You might not speak so carelessly if I told you something," he snapped with spirit, looking into Booth's eyes.

"What do you know? Go on."

Payne did not hesitate.

He knew that Booth could not spare his services at that stage of the game.

So he said bluntly:

"I tried to kill that girl a few days since."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"She tried to get an audience with Lincoln."

"To betray me?"

"To save your life, she said."

"I understand, and you—"

"I threw her into the Potomac," interrupted Payne. "Something had to be done. How she ever got out, I do not know, but I believe Silas Cantwell had a hand in her salvation."

Booth did not speak until he had gulped down the contents of the glass before him.

He seemed to feel at that moment, and never until then, the depth of Stella's love.

She would have put Lincoln on his guard, and by doing so, exposed the plot enough to force him, Booth, to fly for his life.

Thus she hoped to save the man who fascinated her.

Payne watched Booth closely while he communed with his thoughts.

What would he say when he spoke again?

Would he send out an order for Stella's death?

"Where does she live?" he merely asked.

"Number — C' street, second floor."

Booth arose.

"He is going to see her," said Payne, to himself. "By Jove! I'd like to hear that last interview."

The two men were about to leave the room.

"Forget nothing," whispered Booth. "To-night we win or die."

"Let come what will, I mean to bear it out."

And either live with glorious victory,
Or die with fame renowned for chivalry!

He is not worthy of the honeycomb,
That shuns the hive because the bees have stings.

"To-night, Lewis, we stake our lives on the stern throw of the dice, to-night we widow a mighty people."

Booth passed from the place, and walked rapidly way.

The trees were casting long shadows down the avenues, but the actor-assassin saw them not.

He paused at last before the house on C street, mentioned by Payne as being Stella's abode.

At eight o'clock he was seen again. This time he was looking into a private box on the stage of Ford's. He was ready for the great crime.

CHAPTER XVIII. ASSASSINATED

True it was that the blow was about to fall. It is not our intention to tell too minute particulars the story of that awful Friday night.

History has recorded it on her darkest page, and it has been re-told throughout the land ten thousand times. The memory of that night lingers like some horrid nightmare in the minds of many who are living to-day.

The awful report "The president has been assassinated!" still rings in the ears of thousands who heard it that night, or in the first fair flushes of the following day.

Wilkes Booth was to play his damnable drama to its close. He had rung the curtain up on the first scene; death was to ring it down on the last one.

We left Booth at the close of the last chapter standing among the wings of the stage attached to Ford's theater. He had selected a spot from whence he could look into the president's box, which was adorned with flags because of the crowning triumph Grant had lately won.

It was expected that Grant would attend the theater with the president; but the great commander had been called from the city, much to the disappointment of the enthusiastic audience assembled to greet him.

For several minutes Booth watched, as well as he was able, the occupants of Lincoln's box, who were, besides the president himself, Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris, and Major Rathbone, of the provost-general's office.

After awhile Wilkes Booth disappeared, having been noticed by one, and the curtain rose for the play, which was "Our American Cousin," with Miss Laura Keane in the most prominent role.

The house was packed from pit to dome by one of the most brilliant audiences ever seen in Washington.

Who, of all that vast assembly, dreamed that a tragedy was to be enacted instead of the advertised comedy?

Not one. Those who could look into the president's box from their seats saw a smile fit now and then across the wan, careworn face of the great man.

Well might he appear happy now. A mighty load had been taken from his heart. He stood no longer amid the smoke of civil war.

He had all rushed away, showing him the dawn of a peace which he hoped by moderation to make eternal.

At the beginning of the second act a man entered the stable where Booth had left the fleet-footed mare during the afternoon.

A few minutes later the animal was led forth and left in the care of a man who had helped Booth toward the bloody goal of his ambition.

This man was John Spangler, one of the scene-shifters. "When I come back here I mean to ride," remarked Booth to Spangler. "And I'll have the whole North at my heels, too."

He entered the theater—this time by the front door—and from the dress circle surveyed the stage.

The moment for the third act came. Booth had left his new station to whisper calmly in the stage carpenter's ear.

"Now! clear the way!" The underling obeyed his master, and while he did so the telegraph wires leading from the city were severed, so that Booth might gallop to safety with Lincoln's blood on hand and heart.

The door leading into the president's box was open. Suddenly Booth appeared at the threshold, and seemed about to enter.

"This is the president's box, sir," said a voice that startled him. "No one is permitted to enter.

Booth's eyes were seen to flash as if indignant. "Mr. Lincoln has sent for me," he said, and the person who had barred his way stepped aside.

An instant later Wilkes Booth was surveying the positions of the privileged persons who occupied the box, but he was quickly noticed.

Major Rathbone started up. "Are you aware upon whom you are intruding?" said the officer, sharply. "This is the president's box, and no one is admitted."

Booth did not reply, but looked into Rathbone's determined visage for a moment and withdrew.

He did not go far; the assassin knew where to stop. He knew that there was a hole in the door, a gimlet hole, through which he could mark his victim.

After being repulsed by Rathbone, he hurried to it. Standing there he noted Lincoln's exact position, and while he repeated the oath with which he had already bound his soul to the awful compact by which he lost it.

"Now, my beloved South, I avenge all thy wrongs!" suddenly said the assassin, as he stepped aside.

At that moment his left hand clutched a dirk, and his right a revolver.

What a terrible moment the next one was! One stride carried Booth across the threshold, another bore him to the president.

The next second the revolver was thrust almost against the back of Lincoln's head, and then came a report that seemed to stun every one who heard it.

The president's head dropped forward; there was no groan, no death cry—the ball was in his brain!

Major Rathbone seemed to realize the extent of the crime in an instant of time. He saw Booth leap across the box, and he immediately sprang after him.

With a curse, the actor-assassin wheeled upon his hunter, and drove his dirk into his arm.

Then he turned and gained the velvet-covered balustrade in front of the box, parted the flags with his hands, and leaped to the stage beneath!

The whole audience seemed paralyzed. Booth turned full upon it when he struck the stage.

He raised the knife above his head. His eyes seemed on fire. "Sic semper tyrannis!—Virginia is avenged!" pealed from his throat.

Another instant and he was gone! He was followed even then; several attempted to bar his progress, but he pushed them all aside.

The strength of a fiend incarnate seemed to possess him. Like a racer he shot through the open door at the back of the stage, and appeared suddenly before the man who held his ready horse.

"It is done!" he said, hoarsely, as he vaulted into the saddle. The next second, struck by a spur, the horse went off like a rocket.

He bore his rider to the street where he was joined by a young man mounted like himself.

In the light of a lamp the twain exchanged significant looks. "Come!" then said Booth. "I've paralyzed the whole audience."

A way the two men went side by side—past the post office and over the brow of Capitol Hill.

Not a word was spoken until they were about to strike the bridge across the eastern branch of the Potomac at Uniontown.

"Did you make sure of him?" asked Booth's companion in a whisper.

"The murderer turned a pair of flashing eyes upon the speaker. "Sure!" he echoed. "Do you think I've plotted all this time to miss to-night?"

"No, Wilkes—"

"No questions now. We are at the river." Yes, the Potomac was before them.

Booth drew his hat over his eyes. "Who are you?" asked the officer in charge of the bridge.

"Wilkes Booth and friend," was the prompt reply. The man stepped aside.

Booth was absorbed in giving his real name at the bridge. He believed that the officers would think that one of his accomplices had used his name to mislead them.

The wisdom of his course was exhibited during the next few hours.

He used misled justice. Booth and Harold galloped across the bridge and left the excited capital behind them.

Harold could not see Booth's face for the darkness that surrounded them, but he knew he was still at his side.

He thought of the murderer during that ride so many know. The more he realized the enormity of his crime, for he had stricken the father of his people.

It was like Moses dying on Mount Pisgah, in sight of the promised land.

On, on they went, the assassin and his tool, the boy who Payne had declared would desert him at the last bitter hour.

At midnight two horsemen drew rein in front of Lloyd's hotel in Surratsville.

They were Booth and Harold. The youth dismounted and hammered on the door.

Lloyd came down quickly, as though he had been expecting the pair.

Harold went inside and obtained a bottle of whisky, some of which he gave Booth, who swallowed the burning fluid with avidity.

Harold went back into the house and got a carbine, one of two he had selected ten or six weeks before for that very ride.

"Don't you want the other one?" asked Lloyd. "No; Booth has broken his leg and can't carry it," was the answer.

Broken his leg? Yes, the assassin's boot was already filled with blood.

In jumping from the president's box he had fallen and fractured his leg.

It looked as if justice was already on his track. Booth's eyes gazed new flashes with the liquor.

As he rode off he cried out to Lloyd: "Don't you want some news?"

"Yes."

"We've killed the president and the secretary of state." Then the spurs struck the horses' sides again, and the two men passed rapidly from the landlord's sight.

How did he know that Seward had been attacked? Ah! he knew who he had commissioned to take the secretary's life, and he had a right to believe that Seward was dead.

Lewis Payne always killed when he struck. So thought Booth, anyway, as he galloped through the night. More than once Wilkes granted his teeth and pressed his fractured limb against the saddle, hoping to ease the pain that nearly crazed him.

"What will become of Stella now?" A startling cry rose from the murderer's lips.

"Great God! don't breathe her name here!" he cried. "I would not listen to the girl. May we never meet again!"

Harold said no more, for Booth's face, and the wild glare of his eyes, daunted him.

No; he did not want to think of Stella then, the beautiful girl whose life he had hurled to the brink of utter ruin.

She was still too pure for him.

On, on went the assassin and his friend.

The hoof beats of their horses sounded weirdly on the air of night.

Two stars that guarded that lonely road saw the human specters fit along, bearing with them the greatest crime of the age.

Booth now and then drove the red spurs home.

The fleet mare was not fleet enough for his guilty soul.

All this time where was Booth's victim? Where was Abraham Lincoln?

He was dying in a stranger's house, and the loyal North was howled at his feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HUNTER STILL.

But news travels fast.

Before the dawn of the next day the telegraph had flashed over the land the terrible tidings of the president's assassination.

True, he was not dead; but there was no hope. Booth's bullet had done its horrid work too well.

Lincoln lay in the little room across the street from the play-house, surrounded by his family, and a weeping cabinet. Slowly the life of the great man, the first martyr president, was ebbing away.

His blood dyed the folds of the flag which was floating that morning above the battered ramparts of rebellion. He was to die at the threshold of peace, at the open door of a new era, and all the prayers of the land were not enough to save him.

Washington was all excitement. A thousand rumors of the wildest kind filled the air.

Not long after Booth's attempt on the president's life it became known that a ruffian, armed with a dirk, had actually fought his way to Secretary Seward's bed, and stabbed him, so the assassin thought, to death.

Then it was said that Vice-president Johnson and Secretary Stanton had narrowly escaped assassination.

It was even said, in some quarters, that Grant had been followed from the city and killed.

Pen cannot describe the wild events of the concluding hours of the night.

Investigation proved that the vice-president and the secretary of war had escaped, that Grant was safe, but that Seward had been stabbed several times by the man with the big dirk.

Already the police force and the members of the government were on the lookout for Booth and his accomplices.

Some said that they were lurking somewhere in the city, but the police wisely believed that they had fled.

Morning was breaking, when a tall and handsome, but pale-faced woman entered a room on a tip-toe, and bent over a young man who was enjoying a deep sleep on a couch.

There were traces of suffering on the bloodless face, half buried among the pillows, and the woman's eyes filled with pity as she gazed upon it.

She was awake.

"Ah! is it you, Pauline?" he said, with a pleased smile. "How glad I am. Has Silas come yet?"

"No. I cannot think what keeps him."

The woman stopped suddenly and turned her face away.

Emotion seemed to be choking her.

"What is wrong, something has happened," said the youth. "You know something—some bad news. You are trying to keep it from me. This will never do. Tell me what it is?"

Slowly Pauline turned to the cot again.

When she dropped into a chair beside the pillow and took Paul's hand.

"Bad news it is," she murmured. "The president is—dead!"

How the young man started.

A strange light appeared in his almost listless eyes.

"Pauline, Pauline? No, no, no! not dead!" he said.

"Perhaps not quite dead, but there is no hope."

"Who did it?"

"Wilkes Booth!"

Pauline felt the hand she held glide from her grasp.

"How has he fallen then? He said he would not let Booth carry out his scheme. He—My God! where can Silas be?"

Paul called the war detective Silas oftener than Leon, which was his proper name.

For a moment no voice followed his last word.

In the intense silence Pauline heard the beating of Paul's heart.

"That man whom you call Payne may have tracked Silas down," suddenly continued Paul, catching the woman's eye. "If he has, you to him! Pauline, if you will retire for a few moments I will be with you in an hour."

The woman started.

"You must not rise," she said, gently laying her hand on his arm.

"Ay, but I must. The shedding of the president's blood makes me mad. I will find Silas. I will prove to Wilkes Booth the avenger of blood."

Pauline looked at the speaker as if she feared that reason was again deserting her throne.

"The president dying and Wilkes Booth at large—oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Pauline. "A little illness must not keep me here. Why didn't they catch Booth immediately after committing the crime?"

Where did he do it, and how? Come, tell me all about it, Pauline."

This he tried to detail the crime as she had heard it told on the streets. Pauline took Paul's hand again, and began the terrible narrative.

With his eyes riveted upon her face the young man hung on every word as it dropped from her lips.

He scarcely seemed to breathe.

Pauline told all she had heard, and that was all there was to tell of the crime which had shocked a continent.

As the last word fell from her lips the solemn tones of a bell entered the little room.

The woman's head dropped to the pillow, and rested there and Paul felt her hand tighten around his.

Tell, tell, tell!

Not a word fell from the lips of either one until the last sound had died away.

"He's dead!" said Paul, reverently, and scarcely above a whisper. "The great man has gone to his eternal reward."

There was no answer.

Paul turned and looked at the head on the pillow.

"Pauline, Pauline!" he cried; "we must think of vengeance!"

At that word the woman started up.

"Vengeance!" she cried. "Yes, we must now look for vengeance! Blood for blood! A life for a life; but the blood of an owl cannot bring back the eagle he has killed. Where is Leon? Oh, Heaven! follow the murderer with Thy avenging eye. Set the bloodhounds of justice on his track! Let him not sleep until he sleeps the sleep of death! He would not die at my warning. He laughed at the picture of the scaffold I placed in his hands. Oh, God! make my prophecy to him a bitter reality. Give the land his blood to give to the death of the dog, and the infamy that wears a crown in hell!"

Paul who had watched and listened to Pauline, almost sprang from the couch at the last word.

"I think the depths of his soul and stirred the blood at his fingers' ends."

"Silas must be found!" he said.

"I will find him."

"You, Pauline?"

"Yes, I want to help avenge the president's death. I want to put Silas on Wilkes Booth's track."

"Then go, and may Heaven direct your steps."

Pauline, her face all aglow with excitement, stooped over the speaker and imprinted a kiss on his forehead.

"I will be back ere long," she said, turning away. "Do not grow nervous. I will return with the first bit of news I find."

The next second the door shut gently behind her, and Paul, the detective's protege, was alone again.

With exciting thoughts chasing one another through his brain he lay in bed as his face turned to the widow, waiting anxiously for Pauline's return.

"That girl is worth her weight in gold," he said. "She tried to save me in Richmond when I was in Beauregard's hands, and she succeeded after all. When I was picked up in the alley more dead than a rat by the rebel guard and taken to the hospital, she came to me and nursed me through those long days of delirium that followed. And when Silas came to hunt me he found her, of course, and they got me away from that living grave. What don't I love that girl, and how can I ever pay her? The lovers' quarrel long ago is his wife, and the Pauline Dupont of to-day is the dear girl she was then. She rises above herself in times like these. She will find Silas it he lives. She will put on Booth's track an avenger who will not leave him till he end comes."

Yes, Paul communed with himself as the sun crept toward the zenith.

Hour after hour went by.

More than once the invalid passed his hand across his forehead and found it hot.

A fever was coming on.

He saw the sun sink westward again.

The shadows in his room grew long, and yet Pauline had not come.

"This is torture—it is worse than death!" burst from his throat.

"It is more than I can stand."

He sprang from the couch and tottered to his clothes, near by.

A strange, wild light burned in the depths of his feverish eyes.

As he laid his hand on the latch, some one on the outside pushed it open.

Paul peeled away with an exclamation of astonishment.

A man stepped across the threshold.

Paul stared at him for a moment, then went toward him with a loud shout of joy.

"Silas—at last!" he exclaimed.

"Yes!" said the man, catching Paul in his arms. "I am back from the grave!"

For a moment Silas Cantwell looked down into Paul's white face.

"Paul, my boy, you have been exerting yourself," he said. "Go back to your bed and wait till Pauline comes."

"Did she find you?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"She found me, and just in time; but I cannot tell you now. She will when she comes. I have a work to perform. You know what has happened?"

"I know all."

"If Payne, the assassin, had not buried me into his man-trap, it would never have occurred—that awful scene at Ford's. But never mind. Payne has been arrested, and you shall see him swing. I must leave you now, Paul. Be calm! I am going to run Wilkes Booth to earth. When he dies I will stand. He shall not learn long, Leon Lennox is still a living avenger of the president's blood."

The detective then went away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ASSASSIN'S TRAIL.

As has already been mentioned, Colonel Baker, the head of the government secret service, was not in Washington at the time of the assassination.

The detection of frauds in the recruiting service had called him to New York some days before, and the following dispatch found him in his room, at the Astor House:

"WASHINGTON, April 15.

"COLONEL L. C. BAKER: Be here immediately and see if you can find the murderer of the President."

"EDWIN M. STANTON, secretary of war."

It is needless to say that the great detective chief prepared immediately to set out for Washington, but unfortunately for the hunt for justice, no train left New York for the capital until the next day; therefore, Baker did not reach the scene of Booth's crime until some time in the morning.

One of his first questions was:

"Where's Lennox?"

Nobody could tell him.

The war detective had not been seen for several days, and his present whereabouts were, of course, not known.

"I'd like to have the fellow with me now," said Baker, disappointed. "I need such men as him; but we must to work with the material at hand."

And to work "the chief of the secret service went without a moment's rest.

He found that but little looking to the capture of Booth had been accomplished.

Beyond the intelligence that it was really Booth who had killed Lincoln, and that he had an accomplice named Harold, but little had been found out.

It was known that a man answering Booth's description had crossed the Uniontown bridge the night of the murder; beyond that—nothing.

Men said that the assassin would bury himself among the swamps of the Maryland peninsula and the hunt slackened; then he would escape into the heart of the collapsed Confederacy, and from thence reach a hiding-place beyond the sea.

Let us return to Booth, for to follow him is to reach the end by a direct route; it is to tell what Silas Cantwell accomplished, and how the blood of the martyr-president was avenged.

We left him and Harold, his giddy young accomplice, riding along the gloomy road that stretched southward from Surrattsville.

Harold did not venture to disturb Booth's reveries again. He saw that he had made a mistake in reminding Booth of Stella's devotion, and the fierce look of the assassin had warned him not to repeat the indiscretion.

It was near sunrise on Saturday when Booth and Harold drove rein before a house three miles from a hamlet, called Bryantown.

It was a doctor's residence, and a few moments after the halt, the country surgeon was cutting a boot from Booth's leg.

The assassin with his hat pulled over his forehead bore the pain, occasioned by Dr. Mudd's operations, without a groan, and when the job was completed, handed him twenty-five dollars in greenbacks.

The doctor, in addition to the fee, kept the mutilated boot, on the lining of which was the inscription:

"J. Wilkes."

This name was to help the assassin on to death.

Aided now by a pair of crutches, which an Englishman at Mudd's house had whittled out, while the broken leg was being dressed, Booth could hobble about the house.

He and Harold kept close together all day.

Booth had been introduced to the doctor under a name picked up on the occasion, although any man with a little more than average intelligence would have suspected at once that something was wrong.

Dr. Mudd it seems was too thick-headed to suspicion.

"Come, David, we must move on," said Booth, toward evening. "Something tells me that the Northern beagles are on our track. We must get away from this place."

So the men slipped their horses from Mudd's stables and rode south again.

Always south!

The hopes of the assassin rested where the lost cause had flourished, despite four years of battle.

A short distance below Bryantown lie a number of deep, dark swamps, reeking with slime and filled with reptiles.

More than one poor fugitive slave has exchanged bondage for death in their gloomy depths, and deep in the disgusting ooze found a nameless grave.

It was toward the fens that Booth and Harold rode after leaving Mudd's house.

Before starting Booth had consulted the map John Surratt had made for him, and he was anxious to reach a certain house designated by a red dot on the paper.

The twin skinned the edge of one of the swamps just mentioned. All at once Booth drew rein and cocked his revolver.

"Hold on, dar!" cried a darky, who heard the click of the lock. "It's only ole Swan, an' he's been doin' nothin' out ob de way."

"Come up here; we want you," said Booth, leaning forward.

The negro advanced with fear and trembling.

"Do you know where Allen's Fresh is?"

"Yes, sah."

"Can you guide us to the place?"

Guided by the negro, who moved ahead, the assassin and his accomplice went on for some way again.

The negro seemed to inspire them anew with confidence.

It was a tedious journey, for the road was in bad condition, and at times could hardly be seen.

The little settlement of Allen's Fresh seemed as far away as ever.

"Whose house is this?" Booth's drawing rein before a large house which loomed up before him.

"Dat house? Dat 's Sam Cox'e's," said the guide.

The name seemed to please Booth.

"What kind of a man is he?" he asked.

"Southernner; dat is his sympathies am wid de Souf."

"We'll stop and see him."

The black guide may have wondered why the men so anxious to get to Allen's Fresh wanted to stop at Cox'e's; but he did not say anything.

It was none of his business.

The men rode as close to the house as they could get and dismounted.

Harold used his lungs to rouse the people, and succeeded, for a light appeared and a half-dressed man made his appearance.

He admitted the couple, and set meat and drink before them, keeping them till morning.

When they rose to move on, Booth raised a quarrel with their host about the hospitality, and parted from him in apparent ill humor.

The black guide now led them on again, but three miles from the house Booth reined in his horse.

"We know the road well enough now," he said to the darky. "Here are five dollars more to can go."

Swan pocketed the greenbacks and turned away, but when he glanced over his shoulders in the early gray of that Sunday morning he saw that Booth's horse's head was turned toward Cox'e's, and not in the direction of Allen's Fresh.

"We've got rid of the black skin," said Booth to Harold. "Now we can go back to Cox'e's."

Need we say that they found an asylum in the house they had lately left?

They were in the district where there were no railroads and no telegraph lines.

Information traveled slowly in that country.

Of course none of the inhabitants had yet heard a word about the great tragedy at Washington.

A sigh of relief escaped Wilkes Booth when he threw aside his crutches and cast himself upon a bed assigned to him by the owner of the house.

His soon fell into a deep sleep, for the long ride had well nigh exhausted him, and he felt that he must obtain strength for the future.

All that day, except at broken intervals, the assassin slept, watched by Harold, and guarded by Sam Cox'e and his neighbors. Night came again to pass away without alarming Booth, and he hailed the next day refreshed and confident.

Still he tarried at Cox'e's house.

Did he know that the whole country swarmed with his hunters; that Colonel Baker was at work with the best detectives in the world, and that General Hancock's cavalry were scouring the region round about?

It was after twelve o'clock on Thursday night when Harold, white-faced and shaking like a leaf, crept to Booth's chamber.

He found Booth sitting on the edge of the bed, as if a dream had aroused him from sleep.

"Wilkes! my God!" gasped the youth, sinking at the assassin's side.

Booth's glance seemed to look him through.

"See here! I want no cowards with me!" he said, clutching Harold's shoulder. "What kind of a dream has whitened your face? Speak! Don't sit there chattering like a person ague-struck, or, by Heaven! I'll think that Payne gauged you about right."

"Dream?" echoed Harold, forced to speak by Booth's demeanor.

"Hope it is a dream."

"What is it? You haven't answered me. What have you seen?"

"A ghost, perhaps."

"Where? Lincoln's?" said the murderer, shutting his teeth hard.

"I don't know."

"Where was it?"

"Out yonder in the yard."

Booth picked up his crutches, and hobbled to the window that had received Harold's glance.

Revolver in hand, Booth watched the man creeping from bush to bush, and from shadow to shadow.

All at the specter stopped under the window.

Booth raised the revolver, and pressed the muzzle almost against the glass.

Why did he not fire?

Suddenly his arm dropped, he turned and came back to his trembling accomplice.

His own was hunky when he spoke.

"Great God!" he said. "Payne did not kill Silas Cantwell. He is out there!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRAIL GROWS HOT.

Wilkes Booth had not mistaken his man.

Silas Cantwell was hot on his trail, and already the gallow noose dangled before the assassin's eyes.

He did not know that with the acumen of the natural born detective, Cantwell had tracked him from Washington to Dr. Mudd's, where he had examined the mutilated boot, bloody inside and bearing the tell-tale legend, "J. Wilkes," that from thence he had trailed him to Cox'e's house, and now felt certain of his prey.

Booth, after his last exclamation, did not speak for a moment.

"Silas Cantwell shall never see me swing for my shot in Washington," he said, in the resolute tones of a desperate man. "I don't want to spill his blood, but he will force me to do so in self-defense. Get your revolver, boy."

"I have it here," answered Harold. "What is to be done?"

"We must rid ourselves of the man out yonder; we must not fall as Payne did."

Booth glided across to the window, and parted the faded curtains again.

Eagerly he peered out, but the shade of disappointment that crossed his face told that Silas Cantwell had disappeared.

"He's gone," whispered the assassin, to his white faced dupe. "He has crept away to weave the meshes of doom for us."

"Do you think so?"

Booth turned quickly upon Harold and a derisive laugh ripped over his lips.

"What's taken you already?" he said. "Come, Dave; this is the hour for courage. No faltering now."

Harold tried to brace up, but with a contemptuous look, Booth turned his eyes away.

The next moment the door at the men's right opened with a slight noise.

Quick as a flash Wilkes Booth whirled upon the intruder.

"Halt!" he cried, raising the revolver.

Did he think that Silas Cantwell had found him at last?

"It is I, Wilkes," said a voice that caused the weapon to be lowered immediately, and a man came forward.

It was Sam Cox'e, the rebel, and his face, seen in the dim light, told the hunted men that he had some important news to communicate.

"There's a man out there," he said, glancing at the window.

"I know it," replied Booth. "It is Silas Cantwell."

"Who's he?"

"The last man I want to encounter. Where is he now?"

"He has crept off toward the barn."

"Could you find him?"

"I don't know."

It was evident that Cox'e was not anxious to make a trailer out of himself.

"While that man lives we are all in danger," continued Booth.

"I'm not able to follow him, you see. I can't move without the aid of this crutch. I guess we'll have to depend on you, Cox'e."

"Then by heavens! I'll find him," blurted Cox'e, bravely. "He shall not leave these premises alive. You men can go to sleep if you wish. Silas Cantwell shall never report to anybody."

The door closed on the burly figure of the Maryland rebel, and the assassin looked at Harold much relieved.

An hour passed away, but Coxe did not return.

Of course the fugitives did not sleep.

Booth sat on the edge of the bed with a cocked revolver in his hand, and with every sense on the alert. He looked like a jungle tiger surrounded by his hunters, or like a wolf brooked to bay.

"Not a word was heard in that house until long after midnight. And at once a slight noise drove the two men to their feet.

"Get ready, Dave," said the assassin. "No surrender! Kill as many as you can before you die."

But the noise had not been made by the foot of a foe, but by Coxe himself.

The man crept into the room.

"By Jove! I've worked hard," he said, before Booth could question him. "I've been to the river, which is ten miles away. There will be a boat ready for you at daylight. You can cross in safety. Beyond the Potomac you will find friends, of course. I will be in all the directions you need."

"What about Cantwell? Hang the boat!" cried the impatient Booth. "Have you settled that human bloodhound?"

"Oh, I couldn't find him," said Coxe, "so I went after the boat."

Booth's countenance fell.

"Must we fly, then?" he asked.

"Indeed you must. You are not safe this side the river."

"We will go, then; but the journey must be made before morning."

"Of course. You can't get to the river in the daytime. I'll get everything ready."

Once more the fugitives were left alone in that gloomy room.

Neither spoke a word.

But Booth believed that the hunt for him would soon draw to an end?

If he did not think thus, why did he grate his teeth whenever he glanced at his swollen and bandaged leg?

Just before daylight, Coxe returned, and announced that everything was in readiness for the journey to the Potomac.

Horses were found saddled at the rebel's door, and the three men mounted and rode away.

More than once Wilkes Booth glanced over his shoulder, and tried to pierce the dark shadows they were leaving behind, as if he expected to see the wily detective emerge.

Silas Cantwell did not show himself, however, and the men reached the river, where they hid themselves until the boat should arrive.

Coxe went to a certain place along the bank, inspected it for a moment, uttered an oath of disappointment, and went back.

"No boat yet," he said.

Booth bit his lip.

No boat, and daylight was near at hand!

Not until the morning of another day had dawned did the man who was to furnish the boat make his appearance.

He tied the boat he brought by a stout anchor, and went away.

"At last, thank fortune!" ejaculated Booth, when told that the craft was ready. "We will now put a river between us and the Yankee hounds."

And these three crept down to the water, and Booth and Harold entered the boat.

They bade Coxe good-by, and Harold's arms sent the craft spinning toward the middle of the Potomac.

"We're going to outwit them!" exclaimed Booth, in good spirit. "The heart of the Confederacy will soon harbor us, boy, and the hero's laurels will be ours."

Harold smiled, faintly, and bent himself to the work before him. The boat rapidly approached the opposite shore, and when Booth stood on dry ground again, a cry of exultation broke from his lips.

He drew a small map from an inner pocket, and consulted it closely for several minutes.

"Come!" he said, suddenly, to his companion. "I've got my bearings now."

At that very moment the circle of doom was contracting about him.

Colonel Baker's men were at work.

They had set out from Washington in high spirits, and their chief's judgment was leading them aright.

A number of days had passed since the awful tragedy at Wash. Insurgents.

Payne had been arrested, Mrs. Surratt had fallen into the hands of the authorities.

Atzeroth, the man who was to have assassinated Vice-president Johnson, had been arrested, and with him Spangler, Arnold and a score of lesser conspirators were in prison.

John Surratt had effected his escape, deserting his mother to the gallows.

The whole North was filled with mourning, the result of Booth's insidious work.

The martyred president had been borne from city to city, and thousands had dropped their scalding tears upon his peaceful face. The flag, victorious at Appomattox, hung draped on its shattered staff.

A world-knight grief stricken at Abraham Lincoln's bier, and America, like Rachel weeping for her dead, refused to be comforted because he was not.

Let us return to the Maryland trail.

It was night when a company of about twenty-five Union troops rode into Bowling Green, the old-fashioned court house town of Caroline county.

The soldiers were under the command of Lieutenant Dougherty, and the two detectives with the squad were Lieutenant-colonel Conger and L. B. Baker, commander-in-chief of the secret service.

These were hot on the trail of Booth, but there was one man who had tracked him just as well.

"Do you want Wilkes Booth?" asked a man, appearing suddenly to Conger in the weary watches of that night.

Conger started, and saw before him a well built man, apparently fifty years of age, and attired in very plain and well worn farmer clothes.

"What do you know about him?" ejaculated the detective.

"A good deal, perhaps."

"Then out with it."

"Well, I know where he is."

"Who are you?"

"Lennox," he said.

Conger seized the speaker's hand.

"And you know where he is?"

"I do."

"Then let us finish the hunt."

Three minutes later the little company moved out of Bowling Green.

"Hold!" said Cantwell, just before the start, "there's a rebel captain at the hotel who knows where Booth is."

"Rout him out," said Dougherty.

This was done, and a half-dressed Confederate captain who had taken the orphaned Booth on his horse a day or two before, was courted by Yankee carbines.

"Where is Wilkes Booth?" asked Conger.

"You'll find him at Garrett's," was the reply.

To Garrett's, then, was the cry, and away went the trackers with twenty-five thousand dollars reward to urge them on.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ASSASSIN'S DOOM.

A short distance from the main road, leading from Bowling Green to Port Royal, stood a plain old farmhouse, which, at the time of which we write, sheltered a family named Garrett.

The front of the house boasted of a long porch of old Virginia style, and several half human windows gazed keenly at passers by.

Near this antiquated structure stood a barn, showing marks of age and the mark of storms, and nesting close to it were a number of small corn-crisbs and deserted cattle-sheds.

The dwelling-house was surrounded by locust trees, but the barn had none to shade it from the sun's hot noonday glare.

Before this old farmhouse, at two o'clock in the morning, Wilkes Booth's tireless trackers gladly drew rein.

In the ominous silence that precedes the break of day, Baker, the detective, approached the house and rapped on the door.

"Open up, here!" he shouted; "we want to see you, Garrett!"

In response to his voice, an old man scantily attired, opened the door, and Baker's hand lied up at his throat.

"Where are your guests?" demanded Baker, at whose side stood Silas Cantwell. "Speak the truth, old man, or lose your life!"

Old Garrett's teeth chattered; he shook from head to foot, but did not speak.

"Those men—we want them. Be quick!" flashed Baker.

A revolver looked into the farmer's face.

"They are not here; they have gone—I don't know where," he stammered.

"That's a lie!" grated Silas Cantwell. "Scatter his brains, lieutenant!"

At this juncture a young man put in an appearance from another part of the house, and he was immediately seized by the Union men.

A quick glance passed between old Garrett and the young man.

"Father," said the latter, "let's tell the truth. I think it will be for the best," and then he turned to the midnight visitors: "Gentlemen, the men you want are in the barn. They went there to sleep."

That was information enough, and leaving old Garrett at the house under guard, the men-hunters turned toward the barn.

The old trap was speedily surrounded by the troops, who were dismounted for the purpose, and stood at regular intervals around it.

Baker stepped forward and listened for a moment.

He heard a rustling of straw on the inside.

They had reached the end of the trail at last.

Having listened for a moment and made out the movements of two persons, Baker called out:

"I have a proposal to make to you men in there. I will send in to you young Garrett. Either surrender to him or see the barn fired. We shall take you alive, or have a shooting match with our carbines."

There was no answer.

If Baker could have looked beyond the weather boarding of the barn at that moment he would have seen the face of one of the inmates of the pen, while the eyes of the other flashed madly.

"Wilkes, they are too many for us," said the pale faced youth.

"Hadt' we better give up the fight?"

"What! surrender?" was the quick response, like a serpent's hiss. "I didn't do my work to die like a dog! Don't mention surrender again," and Harold shrank quivering from the assassin's side.

"Here is Garrett," said Baker, who had unlocked the door of the barn by this time, and a moment later the farmer's boy was pushed inside.

"You've got cheek to come here," cried Booth's voice, in bitter tones, as Garrett confronted him. "Get out of here! You have betrayed me! I'll kill you if you remain!"

Fearing for his life, John Garrett crept back to the door and was left out.

Booth now stood among the hay leaning on a crutch, and armed with a revolver.

A look of stern determination lighted up his mad eyes.

He must have realized in that thrilling moment that the end was near.

"I wonder if Cantwell is out there?" he muttered. "I'd like to drive a bullet into his brain first. I could do then!"

He started forward, but stopped suddenly, and then shrank from the cracks.

All at once the gleam of a candle dazzled his eyes.

Then he heard Baker's voice:

"You must surrender in there," the detective said. "Pass out your firearms. There's no chance for you. We give you five minutes to decide."

"What do you want with us?" asked Booth.

"You know very well."

Several minutes passed away.

Suddenly the assassin started forward.

"Is Silas Cantwell out there?" he asked.
The war detective answered for himself.
"I am here."
As Booth went back to his old post an oath fell from his lips.
"We've waited long enough on you, Booth," said Baker. "If you don't surrender, we'll fire the barn!"
"Withdraw your forces one hundred yards from the barn and I will come," was the reply. "Give me a chance, captain. I will never be taken alive. I am ready to die. Get ready a stretcher for me."

A hand fell on Booth's arm as he flinched.
"There are no hopes, Wilkes—"
"Silence!" thundered Booth. "You are a coward, Harold. Payne said you would shrink at the last hour. Get away from here. I'll die without you. Go!"
Then Booth shouted to the men outside.
"Here's a coward who wants to surrender. Let him out."
Harold had already glided to the door, and was waiting to be taken prisoner.

He was soon gratified in this desire, and Booth was now the sole occupant of the barn.

Colonel Conger now took the candle and touched its flame to some straw which he drew from a crack.
The next moment the fire shot toward the roof, and a curse came from the man inside!
It was a fearful scene.

Higher and higher leaped the angry flames, as if eager to envelop the assassin's last retreat in speedy ruin.
The soldiers and all outside looked wonderingly on.
They saw the interior of the barn, as the fire made progress; they also saw Booth drawn to his full stature, calmly awaiting his merited doom.

Silas Cantwell moved forward and put his eye to a crack.
That instant, Booth caught sight of his persistent foe.
"You'll go before me, Silas!" he hissed, creeping forward, his eyes on fire, and fixed on the detective's face.

He had exchanged his revolver for the carbine which Harold had carried from Lloyd's hotel, at Surratsville, and his finger was at the easy trigger.
Did Cantwell see him?
No; the fire raging around Booth obstructed his vision.
Nearer and nearer to the war detective crept the murderer of Lincoln.

He would send another soul ahead of him into eternity, and the soul should be that of the war detective.

He saw only Silas, not the dark faced, Puritan-like soldier who was covering him with a carbine.
"Now, Silas, for hell ahead of me!" he cried.
The next instant a loud report rose above the crackling flames, and the magnificent figure of Wilkes Booth, toppling forward, fell heavily to the ground.

Boston Corbett's bullet was in his brain!
A loud shout followed the shot, the barn door was jerked open, and the breathing carcass of the assassin dragged forth.

They laid him on the grass in the glare of the burning barn, and gave him water.
After awhile the soldiers carried him to the old farm-house, and laid him on the porch.

There the whole crowd gathered around him.
For awhile the assassin's eyes wandered wildly, then they became fixed on one man—the war detective.
Cantwell approached and bent over the murderer.

Booth tried to speak; he wanted to say something about Cantwell's persistent hunt, but he had not the power.
Suddenly his head fell back, the death gurgle sounded in his throat, and with his eyes fixed triumphantly on Cantwell, he muttered—

"Useless—useless," and died!
Yes, useless had been his life, and the shot he had fired to avenge the Confederacy had killed more than one.

Silas Cantwell looked down into the murderer's face a moment and turned away.
There seemed a glitter of victory in the war detective's eyes.
He had kept his word.

He stood at the end of Wilkes Booth's crimson trail.
In a saddle blanket they sewed him up, making it his shroud, and moved the corpse into the war negro's wagon.
Wilkes Booth was going back to the scene of his crime—to Washington.

Retribution had followed him without a moment's rest.
Vengeance guided by justice had tracked him down.
Harold rode behind the corpse of his friend and master, guarded by Union cavalrymen.

He was riding to the gallows.
Silas Cantwell entered the capital with the body of Booth.
The excitement was intense.
"I wonder what Payne will say when he sees me?" said the detective, to himself.
"I don't dream that I escaped from his man-trap. I will appear to him like a ghost, but first I must see Paul and his friend, and Stella."

Stella?
Yes the girl who had given her heart to Wilkes Booth.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JUSTICE.

It was in the dusk of the evening when Silas Cantwell paused on the step of the humble house on C street where Stella had lodgings.

In response to his knock the door was opened by a woman who told him that the person he sought was up stairs.

The war detective mounted the steps almost noiselessly, and rapped at Stella's door.
There was no response.
After waiting a moment and then repeating the raps with the same results—silence—Cantwell pushed open the door which stood slightly ajar.

Light enough came in at the window, to show him the figure of a woman bent over a table in the middle of the room.

His step did not startle her as he went forward.
"Good-night, Stella," he said, softly, as he halted beside her chair.

The girl did not look up; she did not move.
Somewhat nonplussed, Cantwell leaned forward and touched her hair.

It was cold!
A nameless thrill shot through the war detective's frame.
He raised Stella's head—raised it reverently, and saw in her beautiful eyes a stare that told all.

Stella was dead!
For a minute Silas Cantwell gazed into the pallid face, never seeing the folded paper that lay where her cheek had touched the table.

When he did see it, he eagerly snatched it up.
"That handwriting, face of Booth's did it all," murmured the war detective, finishing the letter with a sigh. "Your last request shall be obeyed, poor child."

A brief search revealed an empty pial.
It lay on the floor at Stella's feet, and words—"prussic acid" on the label told the story of the end.

Cantwell went down stairs and told the woman there of his startling discovery.
Need we say that tender hands arched Stella for the grave, or that pitying tears fell upon her sweet, cold face ere it was laid away forever?

"Come! you and I," said a man, to Silas Cantwell on the twenty-seventh of April. "You wait to see the end of it all. Then come with me."

The war detective and his chief took the body of Wilkes Booth and bore it—not out into the Potomac, as it was supposed, but to the old penitentiary, near the arsenal grounds.

There they found an old cell filled almost with rusty ammunition.
The cannon-balls had not been disturbed for years.

The two men removed some of these; they took up the flag-stones, and dug a grave by the light of their lantern.

When the pit was finished, they lowered into it the body of the actor-assassin, and covered it with earth.

"Ah!" suddenly said Cantwell, looking his last upon the grave ere he left. "If Payne had not sprung his man-trap upon me, Lincoln might be alive and Wilkes Booth not here. I cannot tell you my thoughts, colonel, while I hung alongside that pit under the star feeling the huge blocks of woods graze my head as they came down; but I think I swore to live to see the end. I laid for hours delicious in that cell before Pauline found me, and after all, Payne's trap did not save Booth. Neither will it save his neck."

"Why did you go to that house?" asked Baker.
"I was fool. It was the great error of my detective life, but we must all make one mistake, I suppose. I got a letter—a woman's letter—telling me that an invalid there could and would tell me the whole plot. I swallowed the bait. I went; the stairs gave way beneath me. I was caught in Lewis Payne's man-trap, and Cantwell finished with a smile.

We might close our romance here if the reader did not expect us to follow the other conspirators to their doom.

They were all captured.
Mrs. Surratt, with Payne, Harold, and Ateroth were executed at the same time from the same scaffold.

Just before the execution Payne was observed to start and utter a low exclamation of terror.

Below the gallows stood a man, with folded arms and triumphant look.

Payne had just encountered his glance, and, as if a ghost had suddenly confronted him, he recoiled, turned pale, and gasped.

Then he knew that his man-trap had failed to kill; that Silas Cantwell, the war detective, was there in the field to see him die.

And like a brutal murderer he died, without an eye of pity fixed upon him, and without taking the hand of a living friend.

Shortly after the bursting of Booth's crimson bubble, Paul, who had recovered his health, led Pauline to the altar, and the two lovers commenced a life whose happiness nothing has marred to this day.

Leon Lennox, or Silas Cantwell, as we have known him, is still alive, but has retired from detective life.
The weight of seventy years upon him he is spending his remaining days in peace, recalling often, no doubt, his part in that most dreadful drama of the whole war—the plot against Lincoln.

Our injudicious conspirator, Colonel Lovelace Opat, whose heart was willing, although his tongue was his worst enemy, fled to Cuba after the assassination, and even there trembled for a year at every footfall, and started at every shadow.

He is absent still.
Here we lay aside the pen, having told as best we could the romance and reality of the darkest drama ever enacted on American soil.

May it never be repeated,
[THE END.]

Number 233.

Phil, the Scout;

—OR—

A Fight for Beauregard's Dispatches.

A Story of Pittsburg Landing.

BY CAPTAIN ILEAN VERNE.

Number 234.

"To Horse;"

—OR—

The Winged Scout of Georgia.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.

[Ready March 5.